
“GRIPPE CAUGHT US QUICKER THAN THE U-BOATS:”

THE LINGERING SICKNESS OF WAR AND THE PANDEMIC OF 1918-1920

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Happy Sailors and the big guns of *Texas*

Despite the cheerful scene on topside decks, conditions below became foul with influenza while awaiting the final conclusion of the Treaty of Versailles. Although many sailors died during the epidemic, no references to influenza deaths appeared in the logbooks of the battleship Texas.

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THE LINGERING SICKNESS OF WAR AND THE PANDEMIC OF 1918-1920

Americans paraded in celebration after the war to end all wars, having weathered the chemically charged storms of steel on the European front and in the contested waters of the global maritime arena. When the guns went silent on 11 November 1918, the Imperial German High Seas Fleet steamed slowly on the short voyage to Scottish waters. Sailing above the graveyard of ships lost during the epic Battle of Jutland, the German warships formed in line, with flags flying from the highest mastheads, and paraded into the Royal Navy anchorage at Scapa Flow. Observing from the flagship of the 6th Battle Squadron of the Grand Fleet in USS *Texas* (BB-35), U.S. Navy admirals William S. Sims and Hugh Rodman watched the majestic warships pass in sad procession. Setting anchor within the nexus between peace and war, the sailors of the High Seas Fleet sat for many long months on board their rusting warships – under American guns and affiliated flags of the Anglo-French, Italian, Russian, and Japanese navies of the First World War.¹

British sailors played soccer and the Americans staged pickup baseball games ashore, seeking to maintain the appearance of strength. While German sailors observed from the decks of their warships, sitting idly at anchor in Scapa Flow, the once proud High Seas Fleet transformed into a collection of floating prisons. The war seemed over, although the Grim Reaper remained on duty.² Under hatches in *Texas*, sailors suffered high fevers, profuse nasal hemorrhages, and the foul stench of vomit. Atlantic Fleet observers noted the number of flu victims “so numerous they couldn’t be handled in sick bay, and had to be taken care of in special areas set up in various places in the ship.”³

Regardless of uniform, an unseen menace silently cut through the ranks ashore and in the ships afloat at

Scapa Flow. Influenza earlier struck undetected on the European front, seeping under the cover of gas and biological weapons. Although the exact origins of the influenza remained shrouded in mystery, commanders at the front recognized the persistent presence of sickness within ranks. “I hope you have quite recovered,” Admiral of the Fleet Sir David Beatty wrote a friend, “I presume it was the flue (sic).” Commanding the Grand Fleet, Beatty reported that the British and American sailors at Scapa Flow “are suffering considerably from [flu] in the Fleet at present.”⁴

Influenza spread as swiftly as the ideas articulated within the Bolshevik propaganda, which circulated in the text of pamphlets passed among the sailors in Scapa Flow. Along with influenza, enlisted personnel in Scapa Flow increasingly succumbed to “red fever,” as their officers struggled to keep good order and discipline. When the guns went silent in the fall of 1918, the double infections of influenza and revolutionary ideology threatened to undermine morale among the ranks entrapped at Scapa Flow. As Beatty held overall command in the Grand Fleet, he relied upon Rodman and U.S. Navy warships of the Sixth Battle Squadron to maintain watch on the Germans – dangling at anchor in the rusting cold, with limited food and medical supplies, and the pall of death hanging over their collective humiliation. Facing a worsening situation, Beatty and Rodman pressed their German nemesis, Admiral Ludwig von Reuter, to ensure good order and discipline within the ranks of the High Seas Fleet.⁵

Beatty and Rodman instituted strict measures to ensure the Grand Fleet appeared ready for action. Sailors stricken with influenza remained unseen – imprisoned with their shipmates under hatches, dangling from hammocks in the passageways as healthier sailors

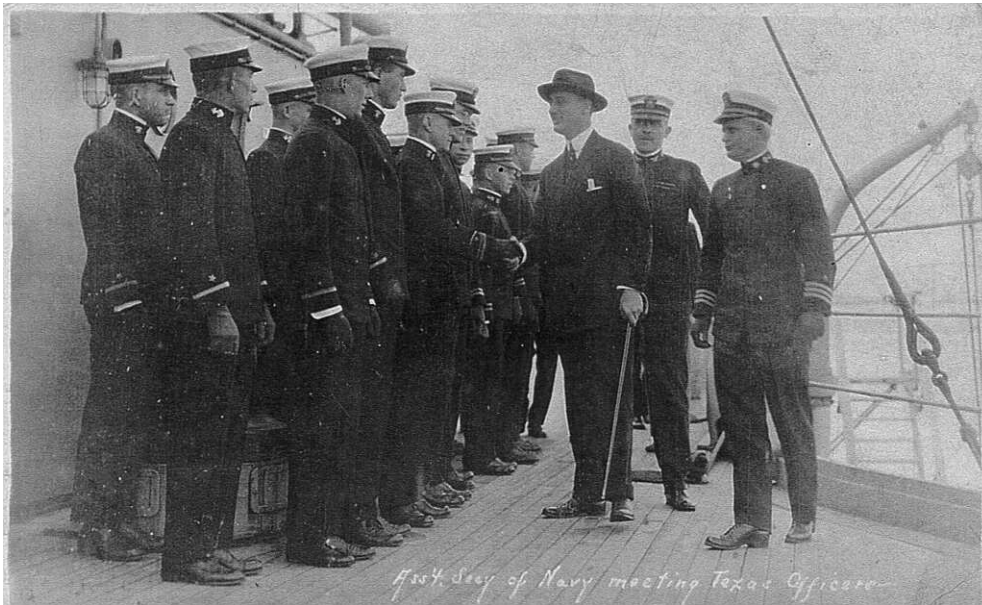
REGARDLESS OF UNIFORM, AN UNSEEN MENACE SILENTLY CUT THROUGH THE RANKS ASHORE AND IN THE SHIPS AFLOAT AT SCAPA FLOW.

made their way to stand double duty on extended watch rotations. Homesick sailors increasingly questioned the purpose of their mission. Although sailors continued regular cleaning and maintenance routines, their intimate existence provided an ideal incubation environment for influenza.⁶ The situation worsened for the Sixth Battle Squadron, after the USS *Leviathan* delivered a shipment of American sailors to reinforce the depleted ranks in the Atlantic Fleet anchorages in British, Irish, and French waters.⁷ Among others on the scene at Scapa Flow, Boatswain's Mate Second Class Humphrey Bogart also assisted in transporting the sick as a member of the crew of *Leviathan*.

War Tourism

Medical personnel on board the American warships and hospitals ashore fought on the front lines in the war against pestilence and disease. Patients suffering the most severe cases often disappeared suddenly – without significant fanfare. The stricken left the fleet to recover, or die, in the remote field hospitals of northern Scotland or southern Ireland. The Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Franklin D. Roosevelt, visited a number of sailors in the field hospitals during his tour of the European front.⁸ In August of 1918, he visited the Atlantic Fleet warships at Bantry Bay near Brerehaven and in Queenstown (Cobh) in Ireland. Roosevelt continued his tour, meeting with sailors in the United Kingdom before sailing to France. Influenza struck as he toured the front. Traveling along, Captain Ernest J. King observed, the “grippe caught us quicker than the U-boats.”⁹

U.S. Naval forces in European waters remained vigilant, as the armistice marked an unsettled pause in the routines of war. The Commander in Chief, Atlantic Fleet, Admiral Henry T. Mayo, relied heavily upon his liaisons in Europe to coordinate requirements at the front. In particular, he empowered his chief of staff, King, to assist Sims in efforts to procure additional medical assistance for the forces deployed in European waters. The complicated relationships between the Royal Navy and U.S. Navy hinged upon the questions of strategic command, operational purpose, and supply. In the coal-fired fleets of the First World War, King recognized the basic problems hinged upon inadequate understanding of the enemy situation, differences of strategy among allies, and basic coordination in logistics.¹⁰



**Assistant Secretary of the Navy
Franklin D. Roosevelt visits the
Atlantic Fleet in the fall of 1918**

Having helped craft the strategy of naval neutrality under the "Navy Second to None" legislation, Franklin D. Roosevelt made multiple wartime visits as Assistant Secretary of the Navy to the European front after the American declaration of war. His experiences later informed his strategic perspective in framing Anglo-American naval strategy in the Second World War.



**Admiral Henry T. Mayo,
Commander in Chief, Atlantic
Fleet, with his staff at the
European Front**

Admiral Henry T. Mayo held command over warships assigned to the Atlantic Fleet. By extension, he also held superior authority over (three-star) Vice Admiral William S. Sims during the First World War. Ultimately, Mayo empowered Sims to run the operations in European waters with the assistance of liaisons from the Atlantic Fleet staff. Among others, Captain Ernest J. King is seen smiling to the far left of Mayo at center.



Captain Ernest J. King (left) and Admiral Henry T. Mayo inspecting conditions on the Western Front in 1918

Having witnessed the problems of command and logistics, Captain Ernest J. King recalled that the influenza epidemic on the European front “caught us quicker than the U-boats.” Experiences in the First World War inspired King to complete focused studies at the Naval War College to examine the historical foundations of strategy, command, operational planning, logistics, and intelligence. Given his strategic education in both peace and war, King later earned five-star rank as the overall global commander of the U.S. Navy in the multinational operations of the Second World War.

HAVING SERVED IN THE RANK OF CAPTAIN AS PRESIDENT OF THE NAVAL WAR COLLEGE TWO YEARS BEFORE, SIMS CARRIED FULL FOUR-STAR RANK AS AN ADMIRAL BY DECEMBER OF 1919.



(From left) Royal Navy Admiral David Beatty, U.S. Navy Rear Admiral Hugh Rodman, King George V, the Prince of Wales, and Vice Admiral William S. Sims

The British and American naval chains of command reflected the inexperience of the U.S. Navy in multinational operations. In essence, the Royal Navy treated the U.S. Navy as an adjunct in European waters. After the armistice, the British pressed the Americans to continue the global Anglo-American relationship under the international vision of a "League Navy" under the League of Nations.

SIMS RECRUITED SELECTIVELY FROM THE ACTIVE LIST OF THE U.S. NAVY, AS HIS CLOSEST ADVISORS IN THE LONDON FLAGSHIP ALL HELD NAVAL WAR COLLEGE QUALIFICATIONS.

The Royal Navy held overall authority over U.S. Naval forces in European waters, although Sims carried the responsibility for coordinating strategic requirements as the senior liaison between the Admiralty and Navy Department.¹¹ Having served in the rank of captain as President of the Naval War College two years before, Sims carried full four-star rank as an admiral by December of 1919. He became the first American to hold command over foreign naval forces in wartime, on temporary duty with the Royal Navy as the Commander, Western Approaches in Queenstown (Cobh) in Ireland.

Although Sims personified American naval strategy in Europe, the Wilson Administration chose to remain officially unattached from the *Entente* powers. He held the official function of serving as a liaison of the Navy Department in London.¹² In this capacity, Sims reported directly to the Secretary of the Navy, Josephus Daniels. Within the U.S. Navy bureaucracy, Sims served in a hastily established temporary appointment as the Commander, Destroyer Forces in Europe. In this capacity, he reported simultaneously to the Commander in Chief, Atlantic Fleet, Admiral Henry T. Mayo, and to the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral William S. Benson.

Given the ambiguities of U.S. Naval bureaucracy, Sims lacked full authority over American forces at the front from within his headquarters in London. By extension, he struggled to secure full support from the Navy Department after he received the elevated title of Commander, U.S. Naval Forces in Europe. Despite the ambiguities of rank and authority within the American command, the naval staff in London grew to unprecedented scale. Sims ultimately presided over an organization comprised of nearly five hundred personnel by 1919.

Sims recruited selectively from the active list of the U.S. Navy, as his closest advisors in the London Flagship all held Naval War College qualifications. Among his most trusted confidants, Captains Dudley W. Knox, Frank Schofield, and Marine Colonel Lewis McCarty Little coordinated combined planning and operations with the Imperial War Staff and the Admiralty. The future Chief of Naval Operations, Commander Harold R. Stark, also advised Sims, as his staff pioneered new methods for orchestrating combined strategy and joint operations with intelligence.¹³ Captain Ernest J. King and Commander William S. Pye served as liaisons for Mayo and the Atlantic Fleet.



**The “London Flagship”
headquarters of Admiral
Williams S. Sims,
U.S. Navy Photograph**

Under Admiral Sims, the “London Flagship” became the primary wartime headquarters for the coordination of multinational strategy, U.S. Navy planning, and joint army-navy operations in Europe during the First World War.

Although staff officers associated with Sims read the combat reports and witnessed the carnage at the front, their primary function centered upon coordination among the multinational forces engaged in operations. Sims performed the primary duty of acting as a senior liaison to the Admiralty and of representing the Navy Department. He also held operational responsibilities as a subordinate to Mayo, which required coordination with the Atlantic Fleet staff.¹⁴ Given the ambiguities of relations with multiple masters, Sims later referred to his headquarters at 6 Grosvenor Gardens as the “London Flagship.”¹⁵ Sims focused upon the strategic tasks inherent with procuring supplies and planning future strategy, coordinating operations at the front with intelligence. Sims relied primarily upon a very small circle of U.S. Naval professionals to plan future operations, coordinate logistics with allies, and disseminate intelligence.

Yankees in Old Blighty

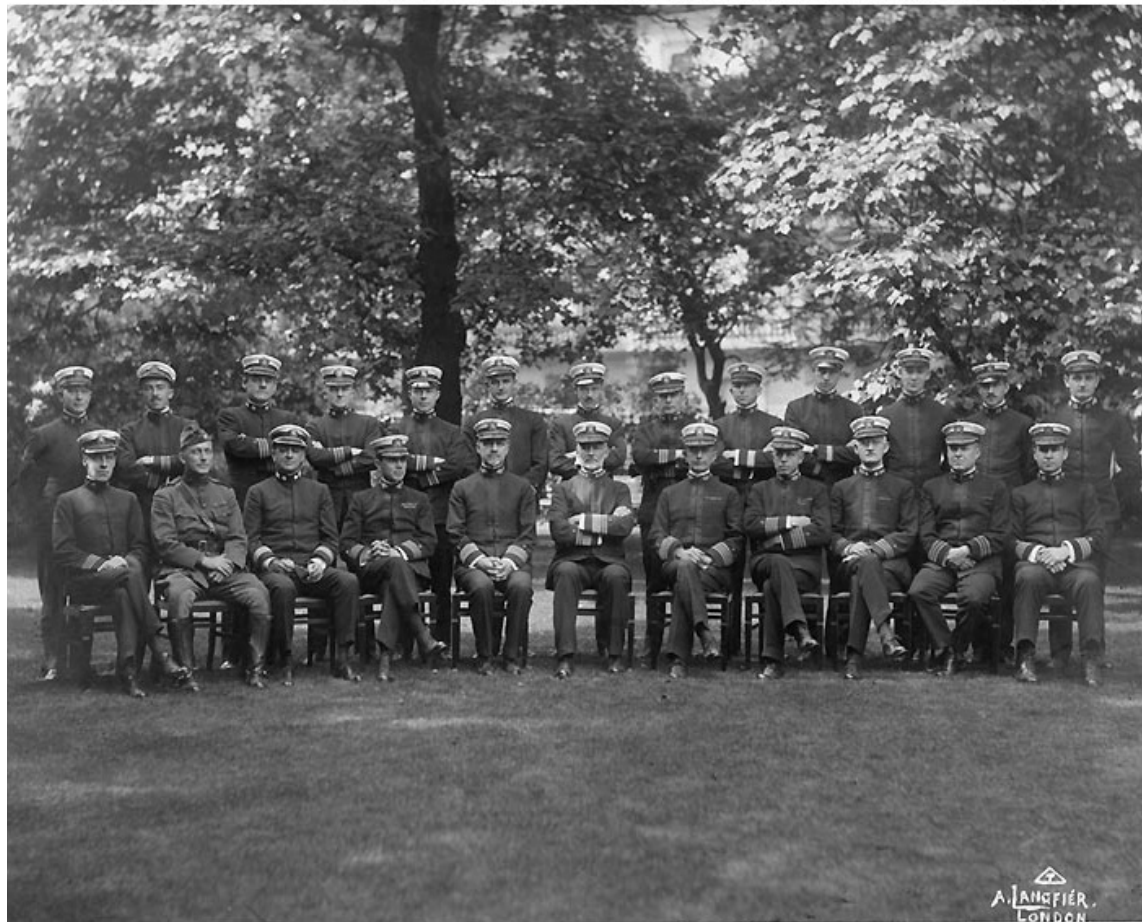
Sims relied heavily upon personnel temporarily assigned for wartime purposes from the U.S.

Naval Reserve Forces. The London Flagship quickly expanded into a major headquarters, brimming with personnel. Official clerical duties mostly fell to the Yeomanettes. Given the civilians serving in the reserve or auxiliary ranks, other volunteers inside the headquarters served outside the control of Sims. Civilians often wore paramilitary uniforms, denoting their affiliations with such organizations as the American Red Cross, Knights of Columbus, and the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA). Sims gained celebrity status in Europe by attending social events, meeting with monarchs, and rallying the forces at the front.

Lacking accommodations for all hands, Sims struggled with limited support from the Navy Department as influenza struck inside the London Flagship. Sims lacked sufficient medical support to serve the expanded requirements at the front during the influenza. He worked official ropes to secure additional medical personnel to treat the sick and ailing on the European front. He begged the Navy Department for support by suggesting “there is no doubt that this [epidemic] is now a greater danger to people on ship-board than the

**Admiral Sims with
his staff near his
headquarters in London,
U.S. Navy Photograph**

*The first American to
hold command over
foreign naval forces,
Admiral Sims also
pioneered modern
methods of coordinating
strategy with operations
and intelligence during
the First World War.
He developed means to
influence operations from
headquarters ashore.*



Submarine.”¹⁶ “Immediate drastic measures should be adopted to avoid serious loss of life,” or Sims anticipated an, “official public outcry and possible investigation by Congress.”¹⁷

Sims grew deeply frustrated with the slow response of the Navy Department, as the influenza struck hard inside the London Flagship. An aide, Commander Thaddeus A. Thomson, Jr., reported, “my entire office is out of commission with influenza.” Influenza threatened the entire strategy for a negotiated peace in the European war, as Sims pressed the Navy Department for immediate assistance. At one point, Sims collapsed from sickness. His Chief of Staff, Captain Nathan C. Twining, reported to the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral William S. Benson, that Sims had a “touch of influenza with a very close approach to pneumonia.”¹⁸

British and French allies simply lacked means to support American forces at the front. Twining described a dire situation on the European front. “As you know we all on this side are very anxious about the danger of a spread of the present epidemic of influenza and pneu-

monia,” he reported, “we are losing a good many men ... I have stopped all leave that involves travel.” “The danger is that there will be serious epidemics on board the transports,” Twining noted each transport, “averaged between thirty and forty deaths.”¹⁹

Sims recovered from the sickness, appealing for greater action from the Navy Department. “It appears to be something more than malingering or just under the weather,” Sims wrote that the stricken “seem alright ... but then appear on the list [of the dead].”²⁰ Asking for assistance from Rear Admiral William C. Braisted, Surgeon General of the Navy and Chief of the Bureau of Medicine, Sims recommended the immediate worldwide quarantine of American bases.²¹

Unable to send additional reinforcements, Braisted advised Sims to make the best of a worsening situation and to hold any personnel showing signs of sickness at the front in Europe. Strongly worded appeals from Sims generally also met with tepid encouragement, or plain silence from the Navy Department. Navy Secretary Daniels calculated that such measures seemed

SICKNESS LOOMED OVER THE PROCEEDINGS AT VERSAILLES, AS WILSON FOCUSED UPON THE DREAM OF CREATING A LEAGUE OF NATIONS.

impractical, detrimental to general morale, and essentially unnecessary.²² His relationship with Sims progressively became contentious, particularly as their differences of strategic perspective leaked into the popular American media.²³ Overwhelmed with sick and wounded, hospitals at the front struggled to treat the exploding numbers of civilian patients, American servicemen, and foreign allies.

Given the influenza, Sims balanced the simultaneous challenges inherent with coordinating ongoing naval operations in Europe. U.S. Naval forces remained on watch in European waters – keeping pressure on the Central Powers of Imperial Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire. Given the deliberations ongoing during the “Battle of Paris,” the victors and the vanquished haggled over the details of a permanent peace treaty under the ornately painted ceilings inside the historic Hall of Mirrors at the Palace of Versailles.²⁴ The fragile armistice of Europe teetered on the deliberations, as Sims welcomed President Woodrow Wilson to the front in December of 1918. Trailing Wilson the following month, Roosevelt accompanied Navy Secretary Daniels to participate in the deliberations at Versailles.

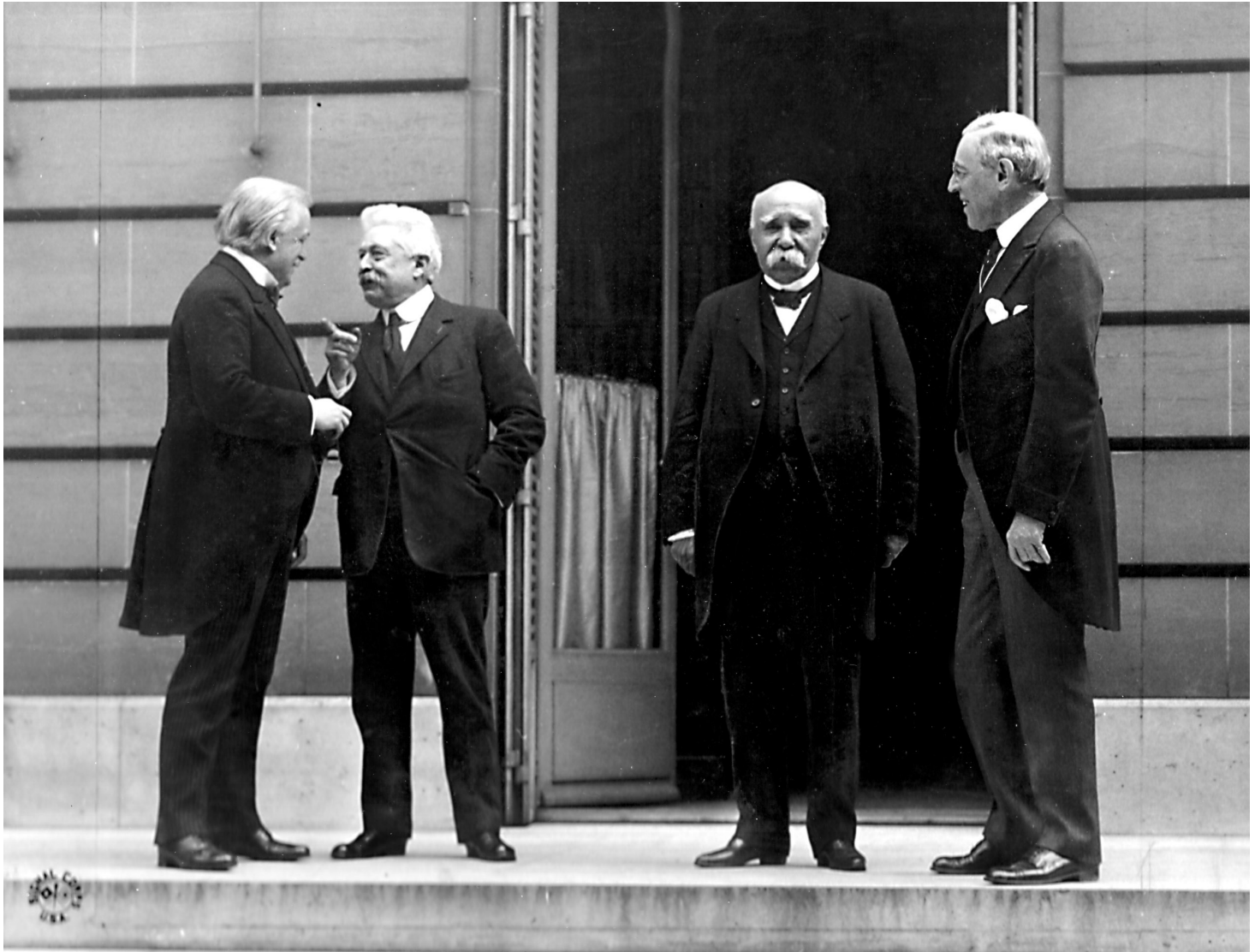
Sickness loomed over the proceedings at Versailles, as Wilson focused upon the dream of creating a League of Nations. Along with his British counterpart, David Lloyd George, Wilson succumbed to influenza during the peace negotiations at Versailles. In addition to these pressures, he also faced increasing popular momentum for the rapid demobilization of American forces. The dream of establishing the League of Nations stood in the balance, as the European powers haggled over imperial gains and war reparations. Sickness hindered the American agenda at Versailles, particularly after Wilson left to recover in the United States. Returning



President Woodrow Wilson, with Field Marshal Douglas Haig, 1st Earle of Haig, arriving in Europe to participate in deliberations culminating in the Treaty of Versailles

in February of 1919, his condition remained a closely guarded secret within the Wilson Administration.

Influenza spread quickly among the ranks and civilian populations of Europe, as Sims commuted between London and Versailles. As the senior American representative on the Allied Naval Council, he hoped to build upon the wartime spirit of collaboration as a vocal advocate for the development of a “League Navy.”²⁵ Although the negotiations at Versailles remained paramount, his staff continued working at a wartime pace to coordinate ongoing operations in Siberia, along



On the steps to a peace treaty at Versailles, (from left to right) British Prime Minister David Lloyd Georges haggles with Italian minister Vittorio Emanuele Orlando alongside French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau and President Woodrow Wilson

the Adriatic, and into the Levant.

Sims remained deeply concerned about the influenza spreading through the American ranks. He received no additional medical assistance beyond the medical personnel already deployed at the front. As a result, American forces remained heavily reliant upon the assistance of wartime allies for medical supplies, hospital facilities, and treatment – while casualties

mounted in Europe. Beyond the influenza, Bolshevik propaganda also circulated among the ranks and in the hospitals. Convalescing with time to reflect, patients were also exposed to communist ideology. The perceived threat of Bolshevism appeared more profound than influenza, as the Wilson Administration pressed Congress to pass oppressive laws aimed at “hyphenates” and recent immigrant populations among the working classes of the United States.²⁶

Always willing to lend a hand, American sailors stood vigilant against the interned enemies of the Central Powers on the European front. Soldiers of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) also kept watch on the Rhine, as others sailed for battle against the Bolshevik Revolution. Caught in the crossfire of Red and White armies on the steppes of Russia and beyond to Siberia, American troops hunkered down on foreign shores. Bolsheviks and Chinese nationalists rejected foreign military intervention. U.S. Naval forces also rushed into Mediterranean waters to establish a standing peacekeeping presence in areas formerly occupied by the Ottoman Empire. Sailing in company with Imperial Japanese, British, and French forces, the U.S. Navy maintained station from the Adriatic Sea, along the Levant, through the Suez Canal, and beyond to the Indian Ocean. Influenza followed the fleet on the global stage.

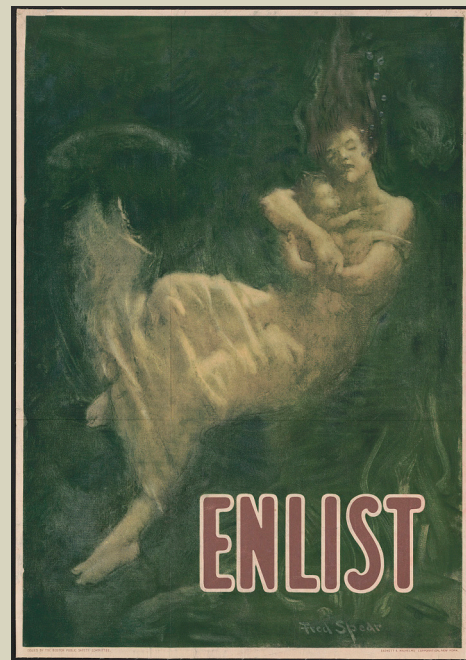
Fighting the undeclared wars for peace in the global maritime arena, American forces ashore awaited orders to return home. Although the guns stood silent, the forces at the front carried the scared memories of the chemical and biological weapons used in battle. They festered in the muddy moonscapes of the western front, as a foul haze lingered over the barbed wire and the troops continued their routine of standing-to from their dugouts. Marine Brigadier General Smedley D. Butler lamented that the influenza “is one of the awful results of this devilish war.” Having dodged bullets in multiple campaigns and twice receiving the Medal of Honor for service in combat, Butler considered the deaths of his men by influenza as being, “terribly hard to bear ... when you can’t help them.”²⁷

The tenuous silence lingered over the battlefields after the armistice as soldiers and sailors held their positions. Mired in the trenches of Europe, friends stood firm against their common foes as sickness festered in prisoner and refugee camps. Cartoonish propaganda, such as the potent image of a dead mother holding her baby at the bottom of the ocean, further complicated peace negotiations at Versailles. Lasting symbols of German militarism defined the troubles of Europe, as the question of international involvement in foreign wars remained an open debate in the halls of Congress. Given the carnage of two years at the front in Europe, Americans widely questioned the purpose of

maintaining imperial garrisons in distant outposts from the Philippines to the Caribbean.

Hot Dogs and Liberty Salad

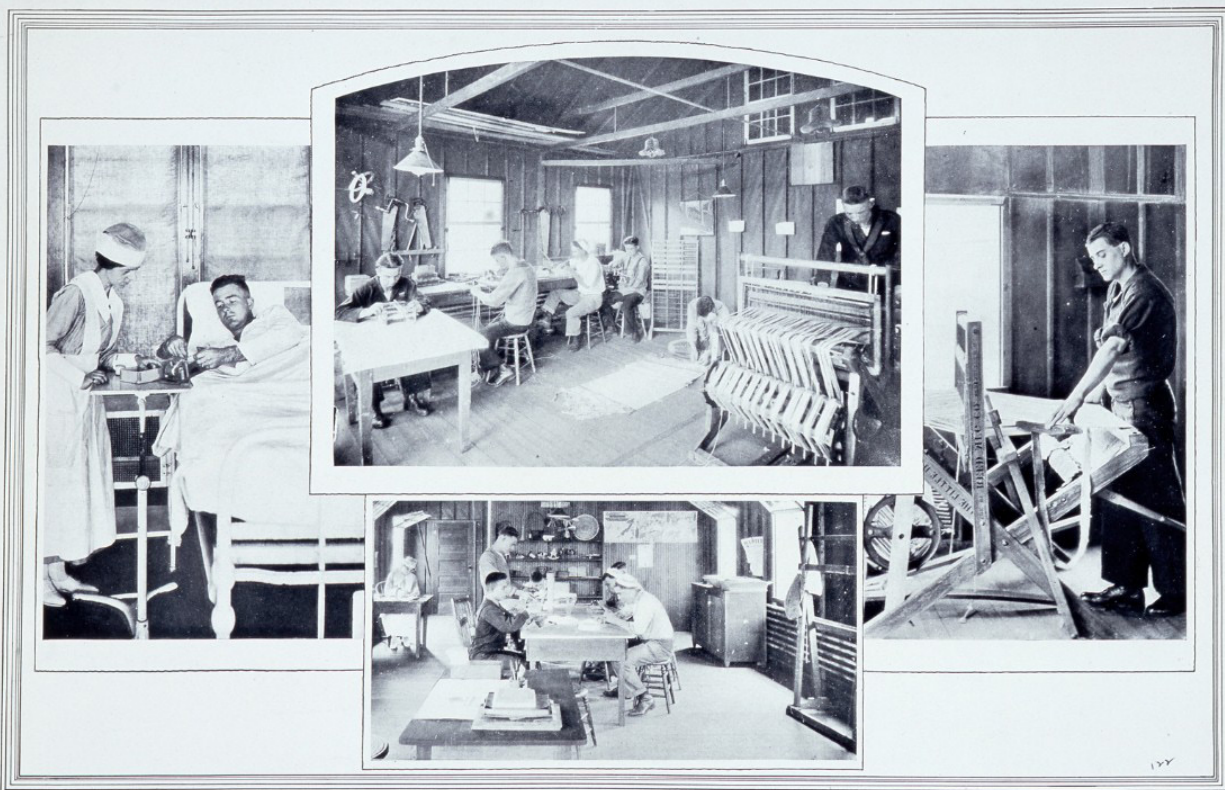
The future remained uncertain as debates raged in Congress about the focus of American sea power and military policy of the United States. As forces coincidentally returned from the front to face the politics of peace and prohibition after the armistice. In the spring of 1919, headlines in the American media also fueled the debates surrounding women’s suffrage, Jim Crow laws, drugs and alcohol, sexual rights, and future immigration policy. Filling the void left by the former unseen menace of German submarines in popular American culture, influenza struck like a tidal wave as



“Enlist” propaganda poster

German submarines appeared as menacing as the drowning death of influenza in British propaganda aimed at Americans. Commissioned by the British, the shocking image of a mother holding her child at the bottom of the sea was first rendered by Frederick Spear of Boston, Massachusetts in 1915.

WHAT THE NAVY IS DOING



Press of Navy Recruiting Bureau, New York

CONVALESCENT PATIENTS AT A NAVAL HOSPITAL

The above views were taken at one of our Naval Hospitals, which has adopted a method of keeping convalescent patients occupied and thus relieving the monotony of this inactive period. The men are taught to make various articles, such as rugs, leather purses and knotted belts. These articles are sold and the proceeds given to the men. Special attention is paid to those maimed during the war, who are being trained to care for themselves in spite of their injuries.

THE NAVY CARES FOR ITS OWN

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U.S. Navy Public Affairs in the context of war and influenza, 1918



Naval recruit training in Newport, Rhode Island

In 1918, a number of sailors traveling from Newport to Boston and beyond to the European front became the first officially reported victims of influenza.

"Grippe Caught us Quicker than the U-Boats:" The Lingering Sickness of War and the Pandemic of 1918-1920



INFLUENZA STRUCK LIKE A TIDAL WAVE AS VETERANS PARADED IN THE STREETS DURING THE LIBERTY LOAN DRIVE OF 1919 - AS THE INFLUENZA PANDEMIC EXPLODED ON AMERICAN SHORES.

veterans paraded in the streets during the Liberty Loan drive of 1919 – as the influenza pandemic exploded on American shores.

The first reports of sickness originated in the inland army training camps and in the naval seaports of New England. Given the influence of propaganda, rumors spread among Americans about a possible biological weapons attack by German submarines. Medical personnel watched for German agents in American hospitals, dressed as medical doctors, spreading the disease across the United States. The death of an army soldier in Kansas during the previous spring also fueled fears of a German plot. In an attempt to quell fears, Braisted rationalized that the “appearance of the disease in this country in epidemic form is not surprising in view of the fact that it has been epidemic throughout Europe and Asia as well as in the Philippines and Japan.” He also concluded, “there is no reason to believe that quarantine would have been successful under any circumstances.”²⁸

As the deliberations continued at Versailles, muckrakers in the American media played upon popular fears of American immigrants. The Wilson Administration also focused upon cultural targets under the Espionage Act, using fears of foreign spies as another means to foster amalgamation in American society. Italians and Irish immigrants drew significant attention while those of German heritage remained associated with the spiked helmet militarism of the Imperial Germany. Although Kaiser Wilhelm II had already abdicated, Americans of German ancestry continued suffering the pressures of officially sanctioned racism – including lynching incidents. In popular American culture, baseball



U.S. Navy Public Affairs in the context of war and influenza

Poster to pay for the war during the Liberty Loan of 1919.

entrepreneurs replaced the traditional word, “frankfurter” with the term “hot dog,” and “sour kraut” appeared as “liberty salad.” Europeans also embraced the American vernacular, as the national front and the influenza spread among the ranks and into the civilian population.²⁹

Influenza and Bolshevik ideology appeared to originate on foreign shores, which fueled the jingoistic portrayals of these issues in the American media. Headlines covering the recovery of Spanish King Alfonso XIII appeared with those heralding the mysterious influenza – branded simply as the “Spanish Flu.” Headlines also fueled fears of the “Red Scare,” as the labor unions challenged the status quo in American industry. Given the complex challenges inherent with social identity in American society, the Wilson Administration launched investigations of German language newspapers and other cultural targets.³⁰ Seeking the amalgamation of society, many artifacts of European culture faded in America during the First World War era – followed by the beer.

Internal terrors of racism and the official regulation of American culture only amplified the fears of German military aggression. Spreading fear in the interior lines

of the enemy front, German submarine and commerce raiding operations also focused upon civilian targets. Zeppelin raids over metropolitan areas in France and Britain ravaged the civilian populations of Europe. The propaganda surrounding the Liberty Loan kept a wartime pace. Notwithstanding the armistice, Liberty Loan posters published in 1919 portrayed the menacing images of German submarines, spiked helmets, along with Red Cross nurses treating Americans stricken with influenza. Such imagery amplified the memories of clandestine German activity inside the United States two years earlier.

German operatives inside the United States earlier exploited the cultural fissures within American society. Among other examples, Americans widely recalled the bombing of the Senate by Erich Muentner, the espionage of German operatives Franz von Papin and Franz von Rintelen, and the suspected German hand behind the mysterious explosion on Black Tom Island. The visit of German submarine, SM U-53 to the Naval War College and subsequent sinking of a number of civilian merchant ships in the approaches to the Narragansett Bay also remained fresh in popular American memory.³¹

Longing for heroes, Americans stood in shock as the

sullen faces of veterans appeared in the streets. The carnage of the First World War seemed somehow worse within the context of influenza and prohibition. Seeking a cheerful alternative, the American media portrayed Admiral William S. Sims and his army counterpart, General John J. Pershing, as heroes. Given the apparent victory at sea, former President Theodore Roosevelt and his cousin, Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Franklin, fueled the heroic image of Sims. With the death of Theodore in the spring of 1919, Sims also lost a very significant advocate. Franklin remained aloof during the Congressional investigations, after Sims challenged the policies of Daniels and the Navy Department.

Deeply frustrated by the experience of war, Sims considered Daniels responsible for the failures of the Navy Department. Sims openly criticized Daniels in private conversations among trusted friends. Ultimately, the relationship between Sims and Daniels reached an impasse. As Sims monitored the headlines as the pandemic spread back home, his anger with Daniels also worsened. Sims worried about his wife, Anne, and five children as they weathered the storm in their home on Kay Street in Newport – having earlier been evicted from their quarters at the Naval War College. Two years earlier, Sims served as President of the Naval War College. He left a letter for his wife about receiving secret orders to go to London incognito, expecting to return home upon completing his temporary assignment. Sims had not expected to be gone for two years.

Rumors surrounding plans to close the Naval War College amplified his frustration as Sims witnessed the diplomatic gridlock during the Battle of Paris at Versailles. In March of 1919, he requested orders to return for a second tenure in two-star rank as President of the Naval War College. Sims planned to reopen the Naval War College and begin classes by the summer. At the same time across the Atlantic, influenza lingered inside the tarpaper barracks and tent farms, originally erected for the recruit receiving station for the Newport Naval Base. After influenza struck, civilians and servicemen convalesced in temporary facilities adjacent to the Newport Naval Hospital.

Influenza initially crept silently among the civilian population of Newport, along with the sailors from the nearby training station. Many transient servicemen resided in the local YMCA in downtown Newport. Local YMCA and Knights of Columbus baseball teams also



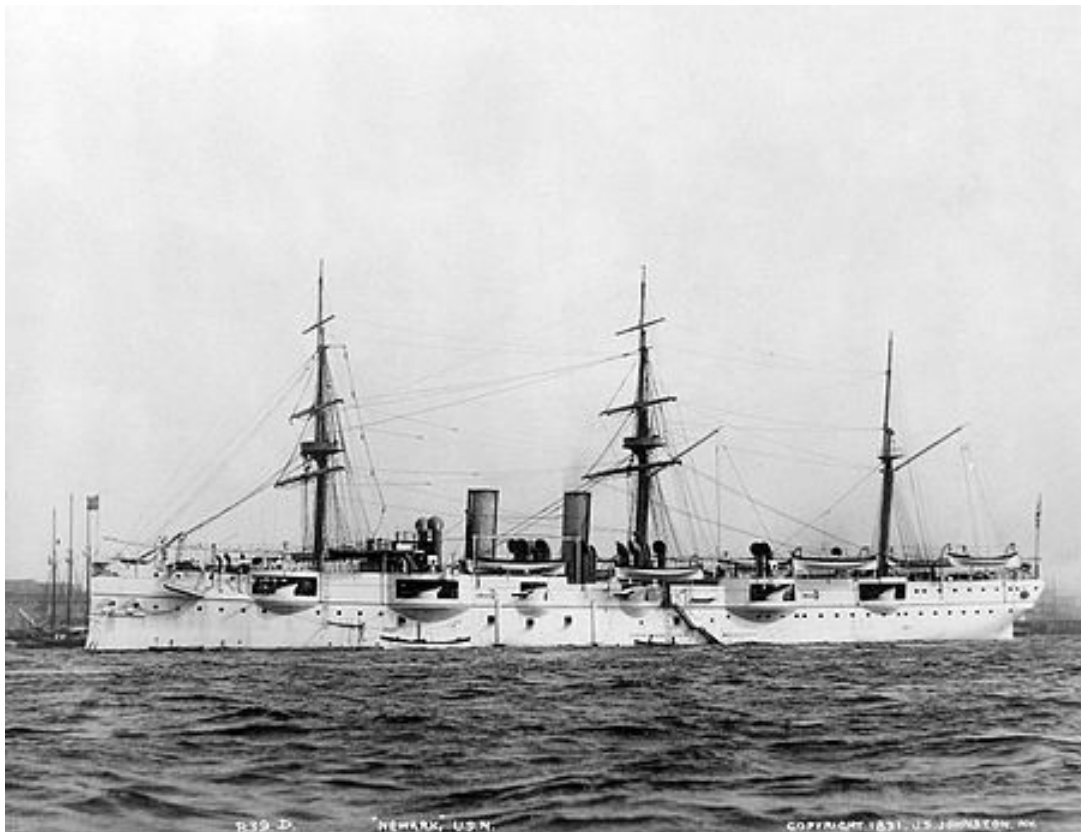
**Admiral William S. Sims, Commander,
U.S. Naval Forces in European Waters
Portrait as rendered by Bernard F. Gribble,
courtesy of Dr. Nathaniel Sims**

Having assumed command in the rank of captain as President of the Naval War College in the spring of 1917, Sims attained three-star rank by June while on temporary duty to Europe. His role in the American naval command remained largely undefined. Sims ultimately pioneered modern concepts of naval command, using wireless and operational planning to coordinate multinational strategy and drive operations at the front. He attained four-star rank after the armistice in December of 1918. Four months later, Sims assumed two-star rank upon returning to duty as President of the Naval War College.

played for large local audiences at Basin Field, near Fleet Landing, and close by the grounds occupied by the Newport Naval Hospital.³² Writing in the spring of 1918, Assistant Chief Nurse Mary Brooks lamented the wartime conditions. “The quiet, comfort, and luxury of our spacious 100-bed hospital,” she observed, “have been superseded by the activities of a thousand-bed



Under the shadow of the Naval War College at the Naval Training Station in Newport, Rhode Island, 1918



USS *Newark* (cruiser) seconded to the National Health Service treats influenza patients at the Naval Hospital in Newport, Rhode Island in 1918-1919

THE PANDEMIC QUICKLY EXPLODED IN THE FALL OF 1918, OVERWHELMING THE THOUSAND-BED CAPACITY OF THE NEWPORT NAVAL HOSPITAL AND OTHER SURROUNDING MEDICAL FACILITIES.

capacity hospital.” Brooks noted the “original staff of fifteen members of the Navy Nurse Corps has been increased to sixty-two and is still expanding.”³³

All is Left in Ashes

Indications of a major pandemic remained largely unnoticed, as influenza struck along the waterfront of Newport. The earliest confirmed reports of naval personnel suffering from influenza occurred on board the receiving ship at Commonwealth Pier in Boston. Many of the sailors arrived at the receiving ship in Boston already sick, having earlier completed their training in Newport. With these early cases, the pandemic quickly exploded in the fall of 1918, overwhelming the thousand-bed capacity of the Newport Naval Hospital and other surrounding medical facilities.³⁴ In addition, the former cruiser USS *Newark* sailed under naval colors after being seconded to the National Health Service. The hulk served in Providence and Newport to provide additional medical facilities for influenza patients in Rhode Island.

In the greater New England area, the pandemic hit hard, especially after the victory parades and associated celebrations of the armistice. Influenza riddled the Newport Training Station and the civilian population of Newport. Local newspapers blamed the spike on the decision to designate Newport as a dry city, in anticipation of Prohibition. At nearby Brown University, National Guard troops from the local Rhode Island regiments stood guard at the gates to seal off the campus and associated medical facilities. The displacement of sick civilians amplified the challenges

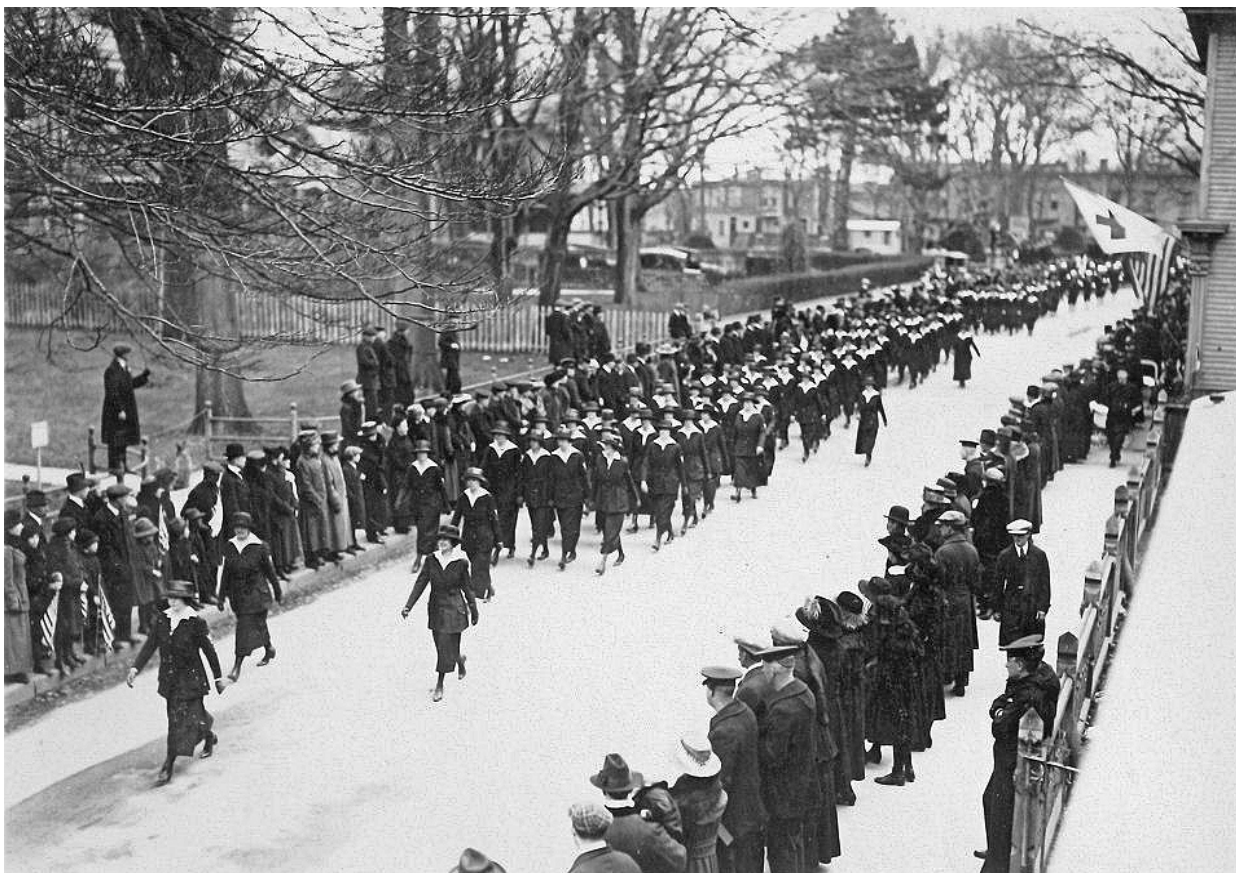
for local military and naval hospitals. To accommodate the influx of influenza patients, Captain Manley Fitch Gates, U.S. Navy (Medical Corps) used the surrounding grounds to pitch tents on Cloyne Field for the rapidly expanding number of stricken patients – to include a limited number of local civilians.

The peak of the pandemic coincided with the armistice, as American servicemen paraded in the streets for hailing crowds. Although they marched proudly, the majority of servicemen had not yet been scarred by memories of the carnage in Europe. The armistice delayed their departure for war, while other American servicemen filtered home in U.S. Naval transports as the deliberations at Versailles proceeded. Those returning from the front frequently disembarked in ports connecting to the inland bound railheads at Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Hampton Roads. The trauma of battle remained an undiagnosed factor within American society, as returning veterans pressed forward into the uncertain peace after the conclusion of the Treaty of Versailles in June of 1919.

Wartime victors continued fighting about the future global order as the League of Nations assembled. Unable to gain political support for his vision, Wilson also struggled to recover from illness as Congress debated and ultimately failed to join the League of Nations. Helping to clarify the naval discussion, German sailors of the High Seas Fleet staged the grand scuttle in Scapa Flow – both as a parting shot against their adversaries and as a final act of collective defiance against the provisions outlined in the Treaty of Versailles and the vision of a League of Nations Navy.



Admiral William S. Sims rides in a carriage and points to cheering fans on parade along Thames Street in Newport, Rhode Island, April 1918



Navy Nurses march as heroes of the war and in the battle against influenza, as Admiral William S. Sims observes in Newport, Rhode Island, April 1918

**Navigating the waters
 of war and pandemic,
 Rear Admiral Williams
 C. Braisted, Chief of the
 Bureau of Medicine
 and Surgeon General
 of the U.S. Navy**



War veterans collectively attempted to return to normalcy as the influenza remained an underlying menace in global society. The ongoing troubles within the Wilson Administration also amplified the challenges for American veterans, as they faced the teetotaler realities of the prohibition under the Volstead Act, unemployment after demobilization, and the persistent threat of influenza. Lacking efficient support from the federal government, the Veterans of Foreign Wars and American Legion attempted to lend a hand. Among other civilian organizations, veterans and their families also relied heavily upon the philanthropic assistance of the YMCA and Knights of Columbus. Later, as the economy collapsed, American war veterans fought for greater assistance from the federal government during the Bonus Riots – rallying to the cause with Marine General Smedley D. Butler.³⁵

Lacking sufficient medical aid, local civilian populations followed servicemen to seek refuge at military and naval base facilities. Civilian hospitals faltered under the overwhelming flood of patients stricken with flu. Hoping to shore up flood barriers, Navy Secretary Daniels restricted access to Naval Hospitals and other medical facilities. The Surgeon General of the Navy, Braisted, amplified the directive by stipulating, “personnel cannot be assigned to Naval Districts to look after civil population.”³⁶

Missing in the calculus, the key to solving the influenza centered upon the actions taken by the Wilson Administration and official support from the federal government. Congress issued a Joint Resolution to authorize military and naval hospitals to treat civilians, though Daniels cited the “tremendous additional burdens the epidemic has placed upon the Medical

Department of the Navy.”³⁷ In defiance of Congress, Daniels justified his decision in stating, “I regret very much that sufficient reserve personnel is not available to undertake work beyond the scope of our strictly naval activities.”³⁸

The politics of Versailles amplified the frustration of Sims, as the Navy Department of Daniels muddled forward within the nexus between war and peace. Sims returned to American shores after nearly two years, welcomed with great fanfare in April of 1919. Headlines concerning the Newport Sex Scandal featuring muckraking accounts of American sailors snorting cocaine and dressed in drag at the local YMCA also appeared with those heralding the return of Sims.³⁹ When Sims assumed command of the Newport Naval Base, he also balanced these issues as he prepared for his second tenure as the President of the Naval War College.

Remain Cheerful

Memories of war overshadowed the American victory at sea, as Sims focused upon winning the battle for peace. Among his first acts, Sims expanded the previously established encampments at Cloyne Field and on Jamestown Island, where naval medical personnel combatted influenza during the peak of the epidemic. Working in close collaboration with civil authorities, Sims acted upon the recommendations of Dr. Charles V. Chapin, among the leaders managing the medical strategy in greater New England. As a trusted advisor to the Governor of Rhode Island, Chapin also influenced the federal efforts to stem the pandemic.⁴⁰

Chapin advised Sims in assisting the heroic efforts of



Dedication of the First World War Memorial at Miantonomi Park in Newport, Rhode Island, 1929

locally assigned military and naval medical personnel. Without first asking for permission from the Navy Department, Sims collaborated with local authorities to improve conditions in the hospital encampments in the local vicinity of Rhode Island, Connecticut, and Massachusetts. Navy personnel worked alongside with civilians in treating stricken patients in makeshift hospitals surrounding Newport on Fort Adams, Block Island, and Jamestown Island. In the official Navy Department report to Congress, the Naval Training Station in Newport appeared on the list of major influenza epicenters.

Working long hours in close quarters, the sailors stricken with influenza in the greater Newport area received treatment in makeshift field hospitals. Over one thousand "men were transferred from the receiving barracks at Cloyne Field and quartered in large



Anne Sims speaks at the dedication of the First World War Memorial at Miantonomi Park in Newport, Rhode Island, 1929

Anne Sims championed efforts to help veterans after the First World War, including her husband, Admiral William S. Sims, who can be seen at center and to her left. Bronze plaques featured the names of local servicemen who fell during the war - including a number of those who died of influenza during the pandemic of 1918 - 1920.

pyramidal tents on the Vanderbilt farm." The Navy Department reported that "removal to the tent camp in the country appeared to check the epidemic." On Block Island, naval personnel "moved into tents because it was noted that cases of influenza developed only in men subsisted in the civilian community."⁴¹ Although influenza lingered as a fading threat as the casualty reports subsided, the sanitarium on Jamestown Island continued operating as the consolidated facility for patients "convalescing from influenza."⁴²

Other controversies also drew media interest, as Sims went to war against the Navy Department bureaucracy and election year politics overshadowed the troubles of the more recent past. Memories of war ultimately intermixed with the forgotten legacies of the influenza pandemic as Americans returned to the routines of peace.

Long after the newspapers stopped paying attention, medical practitioners continued dealing with the sickness, developing treatments, and studying the legacies of the Spanish Flu pandemic.⁴³

Looking outward to an uncertain future in his second tenure at the helm of the Naval War College, Sims used the institution as a forum for open discussion and debate. He challenged fellow practitioners to examine the past failures of the U.S. Navy in efforts to better prepare for the inevitable future. Having witnessed the selfless efforts of sailors in war and doctors in peace, he refuted the idea that heroes “must kill a lot of people in order to gain distinction.”⁴⁴

Sims recognized the task of studying the past for the practical purposes of informing strategic discussions about the future. During his second tenure at the Naval War College, Sims established a “Historical Section” under Captain Dudley W. Knox to inform future strategy – in both peace and war. Using the past to educate practitioners in anticipation of the future, Knox emphasized the point of maintaining navies, “not to make war but to preserve peace, not to be predatory but to shield the free development of commerce, not to unsettle the world but to stabilize it through the promotion of law and order.”⁴⁵ Having witnessed the carnage of the First World War, Sims and his associates drew from history to educate the future U.S. Navy and joint military services to focus upon the heroic *failures* of the past. “Victory is a feeble teacher,” Sims thought, “enlightenment follows when all is left in ashes.”⁴⁶

In order to secure a lasting peace, he transformed the educational focus of the Naval War College to examine the lingering consequences of war. The shocking realities of unrestricted tactics against civilian targets coincided with the industrial carnage of battle closer to the front, the inhumanity of chemical and biological weapons, and the lingering question of civil-military relations in American culture. Although weapons universally have the capacity to cause mass destruction whether in peace or war, the haunting specter of chemical and biological warfare remained a major concern in subsequent wars and beyond into the twenty-first century.

As the human phenomenon of war remains intertwined with the strategic mission of the naval and military services in fighting the battles of peace. When faced with

SIMS ENDURED THE MOST UNPREDICTABLE CIRCUMSTANCES BY REMINDING CLOSE FRIENDS AND FELLOW AMERICANS TO “REMAIN CHEERFUL.”

natural disasters and other unpredictable challenges, such as modern pandemics, the American naval services have consistently demonstrated the unique capacity of estimating the situation, framing a plan, making sound military decisions, and ultimately winning sustainable peacetime end objectives. Gazing into the distant mirror of the First World War era, contemporary readers may find many familiar themes. Although the past is history, all humanity may eventually expect to become part of history.

Drawing perspective from the past to boldly go into the uncharted waters of the future, the U.S. Navy muddled through in battles against foreign enemies in war and unseen disease in peace. Indeed, navies have always operated within the strategic nexus between peace and war. Considering the lessons of the First World War and the influenza pandemic of a century ago, Sims demonstrated the fundamental importance of studying the past as preparation for the worst possible challenges of the future. Reducing his enlightened approach to a simple phrase, Sims endured the most unpredictable circumstances by reminding close friends and fellow Americans to “remain cheerful.”⁴⁷

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³ Newport, Rhode Island, Naval War College, Hattendorf Historical Center / Naval Historical Collection (NWC), U.S. Naval Institute Oral History Collection, Harry W. Hill.

⁴ Special thanks to my friend, Nicholas Jellicoe for sharing the passing reference to flu in the Grand Fleet, which David Beatty sent to Eric Geddes on 11 May 1918.

⁵ Jellicoe, *Last Days of the High Seas Fleet*, 119-135

⁶ Still, "Everybody is Sick With the Flu," 37.

⁷ Jerry W. Jones, *U.S. Battleship Operations in World War I* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1998), 68-69, 105, and 117-18.

⁸ Geoffrey C. Ward, "FDR's Western Front Idyll," in Robert Cowley, ed., *Experience of War* (New York: Laurel Doubleday, 1992), 352.

⁹ NWC, King Papers, NWC, King Papers, Box 3, "World War I," typescript circa 1948.

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¹³ Dudley W. Knox, comp., *The American Naval Planning Section London* (Washington, D.C.: Navy Department, 1923), 231, 297, 505-07.

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¹⁷ NARA, RG 52, Records of the Navy Department, File 130212, Sims to OpNav 18 October 1918.

¹⁸ Washington, D.C., Naval History and Heritage Command (NHHC), William S. Sims papers, Box 49, Twining to Benson, 29 November 1918.

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²⁴ Jerry W. Jones, "The Naval Battle of Paris," in *Naval War College Review* Vol. 62, No. 2 (Spring, 2009), 77-89.

²⁵ Gerald E. Wheeler, *Admiral William Veazie Pratt, U.S. Navy: A Sailor's Life* (Washington, D.C.: Navy Department – Navy History Division, 1974), 130-31.

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³¹ NWC, RG 8, Series II, ONI Reports, "U-boat visit to college," Rear Admiral Austin M. Knight (comp.), November 1916, 30-34; Hans Rose, "With the U-53 to America," in *The Living Age* (26 November 1926), 35; Michael L. Hadley and Roger Sarty, *Tin Pots and Pirate Ships: Canadian Naval Forces and German Sea Raiders, 1880-1918* (Montreal, Canada: McGill-Queens, 1991), 157-80; R.H. Gibson and Maurice Prendergast, *The German Submarine War, 1914-1918* (London: Constable & Co., 1931), 111-40, 160, and 307-14; Paul König, *Die Fahrt der Deutschland* (New York: Hearst International Library, 1916), ix-xii, 122-82, and 211-54; and Alfred von Niezychowski, *The Cruise of the Kronprinz Wilhelm* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1929), vii-xvi, 13-51, 277-300.

³² Basin Field remains among the oldest baseball fields in the United States. The ballpark was rechristened in 1936 in honor of U.S. Army Private Bernardino Cardines. Born in Italy, Cardines volunteered for service in the U.S. Army hoping to become an American citizen. He volunteered for a trench raid and was killed in combat on the western front in September of 1918. Marking the centenary of his death, the Naval War College stages an educational program and commemorative Army-Navy baseball game. Currently serving personnel play ball in period uniforms at Cardines Field for the yearly "Cardines Classic."

³³ Mary Brooks, "The Naval Hospital, Newport, R.I.," in *The American Journal of Nursing* Vol. 18, No. 8 (May, 1918), 627-633.

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³⁶ NARA, RG 52, Braisted to Commissioner of Health, Boston, Massachusetts, 2 November 1918.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Lawrence R. Murphy, *Perverts by Official Order: The Campaign Against Homosexuals by the United States Navy* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1988), 154, 162, and 251-99; John Loughery, *The Other Side of Silence: Men's Lives and Gay Identities – A Twentieth Century History* (New York: Henry Holt, 1998), 1-16; and Ryan Wadle, *Selling Sea Power: The U.S. Navy and Public Relations, 1917-1941* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 2019), 3-62.

⁴⁰ James H. Cassedy, Charles V. Chapin and the Public Health Movement (Harvard University Press, 1962), 181-224.

⁴¹ Josephus Daniels, ed., *Report of the Secretary of the Navy: Miscellaneous Reports* (Washington, D.C.: Navy Department, 1919) 2492-93.

⁴² Sue Maden and Patty Cassidy, "1918 Influenza Outbreak Wreaked Havoc for Months," in *Jamestown Press* 26 March 2020 [online] >> <https://www.jamestownpress.com/articles/1918-influenza-outbreak-wreaked-havoc-for-months/> <<

⁴³ Little, "Tarnished Victory?," 1-29.

⁴⁴ Morison, Admiral Sims, 334.

⁴⁵ LC, Knox Papers, Box 13, Rough Notes and Article Drafts, "The Navy and Public Indoctrination."

⁴⁶ NWC, Manuscript Collection 354, Dr. Nathaniel M. Sims collection of Sims and Hitchcock family Papers, Box 18, Transcriptions of Sims letters, undated annotation, circa 1919.

⁴⁷ Wheeler, Pratt, 107, fn. 21.

Author's Note:

Through the good offices of the Pritzker Military Museum and Library, the Hattendorf Historical Center at the Naval War College continues developing graduate educational programs and advanced original documentary research. Given the pivotal influence of the First World War upon the U.S. Navy, the present work draws from material provided by the grandsons of admirals John R. Jellicoe and William S. Sims. The author is indebted to Nicholas Jellicoe and Dr. Nathan "Nat" Sims for their assistance and ongoing encouragement.



Rear Admiral William S. Sims stands with Assistant Secretary of the Navy Franklin D. Roosevelt in preparations to testify in Congress during investigations of the U.S. Navy after the First World War

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David Kohnen is the Director of the John B. Hattendorf Center for Maritime Historical Research at the U.S. Naval War College. Having earned the PhD with the Laughton Professor of Naval History in the War Studies Department at the University of London (King's College London), Kohnen edited the works of Commodore Dudley W. Knox to examine historical foundations in contemporary maritime affairs in, *21st Century Knox: Influence, Sea Power, and History for the Modern Era* (Naval Institute Press, 2016). In his previous book, Kohnen focused on the transatlantic alliance between the British Empire and United States in, *Commanders Winn and Knowles: Winning the U-Boat War with Intelligence* (Enigma Press, 1999). More recently, Kohnen completed a three volume history about the development of the U.S. Navy during the first fifty years of the twentieth century (currently under contract). In addition, Kohnen contributed to the award winning historic warship exhibitions and historic preservation efforts surrounding the former German submarine U-505 in Chicago and the battleship USS Wisconsin (BB-64) in Norfolk, Virginia.

Kohnen served thirty years on active and reserve U.S. Naval service, as punctuated by two deployments afloat in Middle Eastern waters, two ashore in Iraq, and one supporting landlocked operations in Afghanistan. Kohnen retired in the rank of commander as the Officer in Charge of the Reserve Faculty in the Executive Program at the National Intelligence University in Washington, D.C.

NICHOLAS JELlicoe

Nicholas Jellicoe's grandfather, Sir John Jellicoe, commanded the Grand Fleet at Jutland; his father, George, was a minister of defence for the Royal Navy and the last man to hold the time-honored post of first lord of the Admiralty. Jellicoe is active in historical research and contributed to the 2016 Battle of Jutland Centenary Initiative, which brought together internationally renowned historians as well as the immediate families of battle of Jutland veterans from both sides and provided educational programming about the First World War for the public. He is the author of *Jutland: The Unfinished Battle; A Personal History of a Naval Controversy* (Naval Institute Press, 2016). Jellicoe's career was in communications, finishing with responsibility for Rolex's worldwide communications.

NATHANIEL SIMS, M.D.

The grandson of U.S. Navy admiral William S. Sims, Nathaniel Sims, MD, is a cardiac anesthesiologist at Massachusetts General Hospital, an Associate Professor, Anesthesiology, Harvard Medical School, and a researcher and medical device inventor. Dr. Sims holds numerous U.S. patents and has received awards for his contributions to patient safety, including the 2016 establishment of the Nathaniel M. Sims, MD, Endowed Chair in Anesthesia Innovation and Bioengineering at Massachusetts General Hospital. Dr. Sims remains heavily involved with the Naval War College, where his grandfather twice served as President (February–April 1917 and April 1919–October 1922).



Atlantic Fleet staff, circa 1919
Courtesy, family of Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King

Admiral Henry T. Mayo sits at the center of the Atlantic Fleet on board his flagship USS Pennsylvania (BB-38) in European waters. The future President of the Naval War College, Commander William S. Pye, sits to the far left with future five-star admiral, Captain Ernest J. King. Education in the era of the First World War later informed the efforts of Pye and King to highlight the strategic role of the Naval War College in the strategic victory of the Second World War.



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ON THE COVER:

Arrival of the Imperial German High Seas Fleet at Scapa Flow

Rendering as seen by Bernard F. Gribble

Ten days after the armistice of November 1918, the High Seas Fleet sailing under close escort of British, French, and American warships into the Royal Navy anchorage at Scapa Flow. U.S. Navy admirals Hugh Rodman and William S. Sims are seen standing next to the gun to the left. Seven months later, the Germans scuttled their own warships to avoid the humiliation of turning them over to the allies after the conclusion of the Treaty of Versailles.