

Disabled American Veterans Source Sheet

Excerpts from “Pencils on Street Corners.” In *Wars & Scars: The Story of Compassion & Service for our Nation’s Disabled Veterans*, 4-9.

https://www.dav.org/wp-content/uploads/DAVHistory_DAVWW.pdf.

“All across our Nation, Americans saw the grim cost of the fighting in Europe. Veterans returned without arms and legs. They were blind, deaf, or mentally ill. Their battle scars told the story of massive, pounding artillery and warfare mechanized to levels no one had ever dreamed possible. Chemical warfare used extensively during the war, left men with gas-seared lungs, gasping for each breath. Prolonged and chronic illnesses would forever hamper the lives of hundreds of thousands of veterans returning from the horror of rat-filled disease-ridden trenches.”

- Americans fought in thirteen major operations in WWI
- More than 4.7 million Americans served, and 53,500 sacrificed their lives in combat. Accidents and illnesses, mostly deadly influenza, took the lives of another 63,000.
- 204,000 Americans in uniform were wounded during the war.

Just as the government had not been ready for war, it was poorly prepared to deal with the veterans who returned to our shores...This was particularly true in the case of those who came home sick and wounded. In less than six months, half of the 4 million Americans in uniform were released from military service. The post-war national economy was already deeply stressed, but the flood of war veterans looking for jobs or needing medical care made it terribly worse.

- By the time the war in Europe came to an end in 1918, it had drained our country’s economic resources, sapping 43 percent of the gross national product.
- By the following year, 4 million Americans were jobless.

For the next two years, recession and widespread unemployment crippled the American economy. The veterans of World War I came marching home to a country that was not at all geared up to deal with the aftermath of war...

Recession made finding any job difficult, especially for wounded warriors. Prejudice against handicapped people—even those whose injuries were the direct result of defending our country—kept many capable and qualified, yet disabled veterans from finding work.



Disabled veterans looking for medical help fared little better. There was no single government program like today's Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). No government department or agency could claim overall responsibility for the veterans. Rather, several different agencies were charged with the responsibility for veterans, and coordination between them was extremely inefficient.