



Here & Now

Vol. 6

An update for Florida Baptist Historical Society Board of Directors and Friends

No. 1

January, 2014



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Dear Board Members and Friends of the Florida Baptist Historical Society,

If you look back 100 years as a Florida Baptist a rather unique ministry came upon the horizon. It was "a new way in a new day." It was soap, soup and salvation combined that was new for Florida Baptists. The ministry was "Baptist Camp Pastor" and it had Southern Baptist and Florida Baptist sponsorship.

World War I broke out in Europe 100 years ago and slowly but surely the United States was pulled into the conflict. President Woodrow Wilson was patriotic, pious and Presbyterian. He realized our nation was not ready for war and we only had 100,000 men in the army. A call went out that all young men ages sixteen and above were to register for the "Boys Working Reserve" to assist in increasing the food supply of the nation.



Woodrow Wilson

The United States army was the same size as the army of Persia and was number 15 in size in the armies of the world. Something had to be done. All males 18-45 were required to register for the draft. There were no "paid substitutions" as in the Civil War. Women were first admitted to the military and 11,000 went into the navy and 269 into the Marine Corps. Four million men were called into the army and they were herded into wooden barracks all over the land and especially the south.

The chaplaincy service had been in existence since the Revolutionary War, but there was no way there were enough chaplains for four million soldiers and sailors. Training usually lasted six weeks and as many as 700,000 were in training at one time.



Ocala volunteers lined up -
Ocala, Florida

The Southern Baptist Convention got involved. An agreement was made that the Northern Baptist Convention would serve camps in the north and the Southern Baptist Convention would serve camps in the south. The SBC directed the Home Mission Board and the Sunday School Board to coordinate the work in the south. The War Work Council of Northern Baptists and the SBC, HMB gave \$74,000.00 to begin this work and the state mission boards gave \$20,000.00. There were 32 large Southern camps and some smaller gatherings.

B. D. Gray was the SBC Home Mission Board director and I. J. Van Ness was the Sunday School Board leader. George Green was in charge of the SBC Baptist Camp Pastor service and national and local Baptist leaders took part. George W. Truett visited hospitals in England to preach and cheer the wounded. E. Y. Mullins served as director of religious activities at Camp Zachary Taylor. B. D. Gray projected that in 1917 there were probably 200,000 Baptist men already in the army. (*FBW*, 8/16/1917). A. T. Robertson reported that he saw large cantonments in Louisville, Charlotte, Greenville, Hattiesburg and other places.

Florida Baptists were also vitally involved in this World War I crisis ministry. Key West was an extreme example. The population of Key West was 25,000 and 5,000 of them were military personnel. Yet there was only one SBC church in Key West and its pastor, J. S. Day, left the Key

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Camp Joseph E. Johnston buildings along "Rue de Meaux" - Jacksonville

West church to become a chaplain on the U. S. Battleship "Kentucky." Harry A. Day was the Camp Pastor at the Miami Aviation Schools and J. L. White, pastor of FBC, Miami gave great assistance to Day.

The role of the Baptist Camp Pastor was practical and parochial. He was to be a denominational servant who looked after the men of his own denomination. These responsibilities included building up moral life, forming links to the local Baptist church, conducting religious services and being available for spiritual discipline in and out of the military camp.

Baptists were quick to seize onto a program that could keep young men tied to the church at home and abroad. One of the most ingenious Camp Pastor methodologies was the use of the "Traveling Church Letter." The Sunday School Board printed up 10,000 of these letters to be used by Southern Baptist troops at home, at camp and overseas. The document was made out to the church member/trooper and he could present it as a membership/fellowship tool that would gain him acceptance at any Baptist congregation in the United States and abroad.

"On the March With the Master" was also published by the SBC, Sunday School Board as a daily devotional guide that followed the Sunday School quarterly magazine. Thousands of regular tracts were printed, lantern slides and band music recordings were made available.

Southern Baptist leaders charged all Baptist Camp Pastors to "give them the gospel." This was spelled out in a denominational challenge that stated "the Gospel of Christ that has been the comfort of the faithful, the solace of the bereaved, the highest joy of the living, and the only hope for the dying—this is what we are trying to give to our boys in the camps." (FBW, 3/7/1918)



31st Brigade troop movement - Key West, Florida



W. A. Hobson

W. A. Hobson, served as pastor of FBC, Jacksonville and Camp Pastor of Camp Joseph E. Johnston. Camp Johnston was commissioned on October 15, 1917. The camp had 600 buildings and was the largest Quartermaster mobilization and training camp and the second largest rifle range in the United States. The camp was decommissioned on May 16, 1919, and the Naval Air Station Jacksonville is now on that property.

On Sunday morning March 3, 1918, pastor Hobson led in one of the most poignant and emotional services ever held at the church. All the families in the church who had sons serving in the military were asked to attend the service. A flag was unfurled that had 39 stars and the names of 39 men of the church who had died in the war. The *Florida Baptist Witness* reported that "there were few dry eyes in the audience" and 28 "boys in Khaki from Camp Johnston" came forward to unite with the church that day. (FBW, March 28, 1918). Ministry in crisis was crowned with eternal results.

Honoring those who honor Christ,

Jerry M. Windsor
Secretary-Treasurer
Matthew 6:33