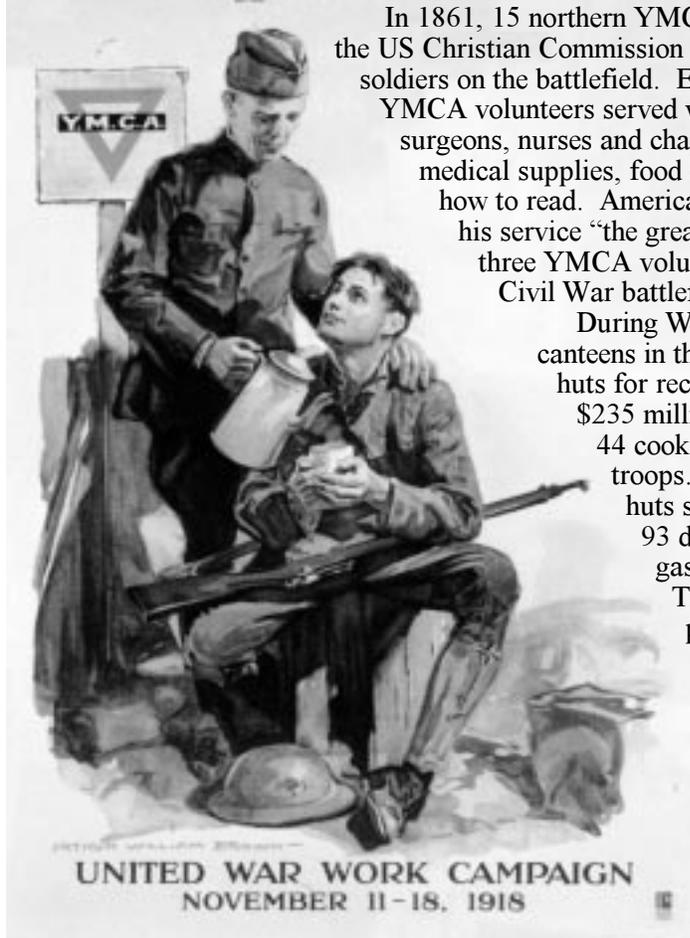


YMCAs HONOR WAR VETERANS

Service in trenches dates back to American Civil War

On Veterans' Day, Saturday, 11 November 2000, YMCAs across the country honored local war veterans and all Americans who have served their country around the globe. Easing the burden of American soldiers — and others whose lives have been disrupted by warfare and natural disasters — continues a YMCA tradition in which hundreds of YMCA volunteers have lost their own lives since the American Civil War.



In 1861, 15 northern YMCAs joined to create the US Christian Commission for the relief of soldiers on the battlefield. Eventually 5,000

YMCA volunteers served without pay as surgeons, nurses and chaplains and distributed medical supplies, food and clothing. Y Volunteers even taught soldiers

how to read. American poet Walt Whitman, a YMCA volunteer, called his service "the greatest privilege and satisfaction" of his life. Forty-three YMCA volunteers, including three women, lost their lives on Civil War battlefields.

During World War I, American YMCAs operated 1,500 canteens in the United States and France; set up 4,000 YMCA huts for recreation and religious services; and raised more than \$235 million for relief work. The Ys even built and operated 44 cookie and candy factories in Europe to serve the troops. There was a human cost to this dedication. YMCA huts sat on the front lines and of 26,000 YMCA workers, 93 died in service. A hundred more were wounded or gassed in battle.

The service of YMCA volunteers on the battlefronts provided a vital respite for weary fighting men and was memorialized by one American doughboy, composer Irving Berlin. Berlin wrote the song "I Can Always Find a Little Sunshine in the Y.M.C.A." during his WWI service. After the war, the YMCA awarded 80,000 educational scholarships to veterans, providing the model for the "G.I. Bill" that followed World War II.

In 1940, the YMCAs, with five other national voluntary organizations, founded the United Service Organizations for National Defense, today known as the USO. YMCAs went on to operate 25 percent of the USO centers during WWII. Additionally, Ys served 6 million soldiers who were held prisoners of war in 36 foreign nations, as well as thousands of German and Italian POWs held in the United States. For the Ys' war relief work, YMCA leader John Mott was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1946.

In 1983, the YMCAs' Armed Services Department was chartered as the Armed Services YMCA of the USA, today operating 18 military Ys and 70 program centers and serving 146,000 US military personnel and dependents. The Armed Services Ys also provide child care for 74,000 children of US service men and women.

