



Written by [Bruce Walker](#) on March 2, 2011

Last U.S. Veteran of World War I Dies

Frank W. Buckles, the last remaining U.S. veteran of the First World War, died last Sunday at the age of 110. There are now only two people alive in the world who served in the military during the conflict which was long known simply as “the Great War.” Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric K. Shinseki observed:



We have lost a living link to an important era in our nation’s history. But we have also lost a man of quiet dignity who dedicated his final years to ensuring the sacrifices of his fellow doughboys are appropriately commemorated.

Many Americans believe, however, that it is a mistake to link proper admiration for the nation’s soldiers and sailors with what they believe were needless wars. If ever there was a war that the nation should have stayed out of, they say, it was the First World War. This horrific conflict bred the first holocaust in the Turkish extermination of the Armenian people, provided the degree of human misery that would allow dictators such as Lenin to establish a Bolshevik state, and created through the Treaty of Versailles a stepladder to power for brutal despots such as Hitler. It induced the Italian people to enter the war for no good reason and allowed Mussolini (the ex-Communist) to seize power, spawned resentment and ambition in Japan, and impoverished much of the civilized world.

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What did the United States hope to achieve by fighting in that war? Both sides were stumbling toward a forced armistice (the German offensive in early 1918 had failed, indicating that the Yanks were not needed to force a peace). Rather than negotiating a peace between two coalitions horrified by the charnel house they had made of Europe, the United States allowed France to impose a Carthaginian Peace on Germany, placing large numbers of ethnic Germans into small minorities within France, Belgium, Denmark, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Lithuania. Profound disagreements and resentments among these displaced Germans were inevitable. Without President Wilson sending loyal and brave men such as Frank Buckles into northern France, no such horrific “peace” could have been imposed.

The collapse of political stability and the deconstruction of the German nation meant that Bolsheviks were able to survive and ultimately to win the Russian civil war. Rather than having a chance to live in a democratic republic under Kerensky or a constitutional monarchy along the lines of Britain, Holland, or Norway, the Russian peoples — housed in what was called under the Czars the “Prison house of nations” — were locked back up in their cages. In the Holodomor (“killing by hunger”) in the Ukraine, a mass extermination of millions of people perhaps unparalleled until that time in human history followed the sinister shadow of Stalin. Would the great Russian state have been able to reabsorb Belorussia, Ukraine, Georgia, *et al*, if there had been a free and friendly German nation? Would the Gulag have been possible if the Soviet Union faced the united opposition of major European states?



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During the First World War, Americans of German descent faced the sort of senseless persecution that often accompanies great wars. The names of certain foods were even changed to “de-Germanize” them: Sauerkraut became “liberty cabbage” and hamburgers “liberty sausage.” Even more surreal, Dachshunds became “liberty dogs” and German measles “liberty measles.” Schools stopped teaching German, Lutheran churches halted services in German, and musicians ceased playing Beethoven. The Katzenjammer Kids, a cartoon favorite, suddenly became Dutch. The Wilson administration continued to push the notion that hatred for German culture and cuisine would somehow advance “liberty.”

Some historians believe that President Wilson — rather than sending young men such as Buckles to France (many of whom either died there or returned maimed in body or mind) — should have followed the lead of Henry Ford, who funded the Peace Ship, headed by his Jewish pacifist friend Rosika Schwimmer, and used his good offices (along with the Papacy) to bring the warring powers to an early armistice. Wilson could have gathered together churchmen and businessmen to travel abroad, as representatives of a neutral America, urging peace and promising help as soon as peace was reached.

Frank Buckles, who lived to witness the horrors which followed America’s entrance into the First World War, may not have fully grasped the dreadful consequences of U.S. intervention in that conflict. He was, after all, simply a dutiful foot soldier of his nation, and worthy of commemoration on that count alone. The men who led innocent Americans such as Buckles, however, have earned an unenviable legacy. The anguished souls of tens of millions, from shallow graves in Russia, Poland, Germany, and throughout Europe, were not liberated by the First World War: these unfortunates were, instead, condemned by powerful men in high positions.

Photo: World War I veteran Army Cpl. Frank Woodruff Buckles met former President George W. Bush (out of picture) in the Oval Office of the White House in 2008: AP Images



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