

# K-State set to honor 48 fallen World War I soldiers

Jed Dunham  
Contributing writer

On Thursday, April 6, 2017, the United States of America commemorated the centennial of U.S. entry into the First World War at the National World War One Museum in Kansas City. Dignitaries from around the world were present to mark the moment and the Patrouille de France, the French version of our U.S. Navy Blue Angels, flew over the city to show their gratitude for America's help during the final phase of the "war to end all war."

But when we look back at the war that not only failed to end all war, but also pushed the United States into the center of the global power sphere, we have difficulty understanding what, exactly, happened to us 100 years ago.



COMFORT

And yet, stories about World War I surround us. One of these stories is right here in Manhattan. It is a story, which, once pried open, delivers a treasure of national value.

We know of the generals, although not all of them. One of the most important, Maj. Gen. James Harbord, was a Kansas State Agricultural College graduate. He commanded the Marine Brigade at Belleau Woods and famously canceled the order to build a secondary line of defense as the German front threatened Paris in the spring of 1918.



"We dig no trenches to fall back on," his scrawled counter-order stated. "The Marines will hold where they stand."

It was the order that gave birth to the legend of the U.S. Marine Corps.

But it is the larger story of the war that is hidden in plain sight on the campus of Kansas State University. It is told within the twin bronze plaques that anchor the southern towers of Memorial Stadium. On the plaques are the names of the 48 Kansas State students and faculty who lost their lives while in the service of their country during the First World War.

Two years ago, I attempted to uncover who these students were and what caused their deaths. A search on the internet revealed an astonishing reality. No trace of who they were or what they'd done remained. And thus, I began an exhaustive quest to correct this.

The result is a story that extends far beyond the Flint Hills of Kansas. Within their names is the story of the American experience in the war, and through their eyes, we are given a view into how our country changed so dramatically.

We are able to see the birth of the First Infantry Division, known then as the First Division because not only was it

the U.S. Army's first division, but in 1917, it was their only division.

Willis Comfort, whose name appears on the plaque, was a founding member of that illustrious organization, and he marched with his men in Paris on July 4, 1917, shortly after they first arrived in France. He led his men into the trenches a few months later and was there when the first three Americans were killed in action. Captain Comfort shows us the evolution of the modern American military and the hard cost of war. He was killed on the battlefield outside Soissons on July 18, 1918, and was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

Ernest Doryland is another name on the plaque. He, like Willis Comfort, graduated from Kansas State Agricultural College in 1914. Doryland journeyed east and was working in the Philippines when war broke out. He joined the Army, received a commission and went with the 27th Infantry Regiment to Siberia, where he participated in one of the strangest military operations in American history.

We see the first arrivals in France and the birth of the modern American military. We witness the onset of the Great Influenza Pandemic, which killed more people in 12 weeks than the war did in four years. The virus erupted at Camp Funston and swept the globe.

They are stories the nation needs to know and which, once told, will give us a better understanding of our past



A view of K-State's Memorial Stadium in 1925.

Courtesy photo

and a deeper explanation of how we became the nation we are today.

The First World War changed the globe, and yet the American element is seldom told. It is time for the voices of the 48 Fallen to be heard.

There is a place on the campus of Kansas State University that has held their stories in sacred silence for almost a century. It is called Memorial Stadium and it was built in 1922 to remember "those from this college who gave their lives". It was built to honor them and for us to us to remember them. And now, almost 100 years after they perished, they will receive the formal honor they deserve.

Memorial Stadium was never finished, the Memorial Hall entrance never built and the Memorial never placed. That is, until now.

On Friday, April 21, at 2:30 p.m., the formal dedication of World War One Memorial Stadium will take place

inside the stadium. The ceremony is free and open to the public, and all are encouraged to attend. Remarks will be made by Dr. Matthew Naylor, the CEO of the National World War I Museum in Kansas City, and by K-State President Richard Myers. The First Infantry Division colors will be flown and a wreath will be laid in honor of Capt. Willis Comfort. It will be a proud day in the university's history.

And a day for which we, and the 48 Fallen, have waited nearly 100 years.

*Jed Dunham is a 1996 graduate of Kansas State University and the current head coach of the K-State lacrosse team. His work with the "48 Fallen 48 Found Project" was instrumental in advancing the formal dedication of Memorial Stadium, and he was commissioned by the K-State Division of Communications and Marketing to write a complete history of Memorial Stadium, which will be available soon.*

# Kansas regulators reject \$12.2B Westar sale to Great Plains

Associated Press

TOPEKA — Kansas regulators on Wednesday rejected the proposed sale of the state's largest electric company to a Missouri firm, concluding that the \$12.2 billion price was too high and would leave the combined utility financially weaker than the separate companies.

The Kansas Corporation Commission issued its order against a proposal from Kansas City, Missouri-based Great Plains Energy Inc. to buy Topeka-based Westar Energy Inc. after consumer advocates and the commission's own staff criticized the acquisition. Opponents argued that Great Plains was paying far too much and regulators could be forced to boost rates to keep the combined company stable.

"The Commission

"What this means to Jane and Joe is that we're going to continue with Westar and KCP&L in the manner that they've done before. That's been a good deal for the consumer."

— David Nickel

agrees that based on their geographies a merger makes sense. But not this merger," the commission said in its unanimous order. "The proposed transaction is not a merger of equals, but an acquisition with an excessive purchase price."

The commission's order doesn't necessarily doom the merger, but it will at least delay the transaction.

Great Plains is the parent of Kansas City Power & Light Co., and its proposed acquisition

of Westar would give it 1.5 million customers from central Kansas to central Missouri. Great Plains and Westar argued the deal would create nearly \$2 billion in operating efficiencies over the next decade to keep electric rates in check.

But the commission questioned the companies' estimates for potential savings, calling them "too speculative" to show that the new, combined company could pass savings onto its customers. The commission also concluded

that the deal likely would lead to a downgrade in Great Plains' credit ratings, potentially increasing its future borrowing costs.

"What this means to Jane and Joe is that we're going to continue with Westar and KCP&L in the manner that they've done before," said David Nickel, consumer counsel for the Citizens' Utility Ratepayers Board, a state agency representing small businesses and residential customers. "That's been a good deal for the consumer."

Westar and Great Plains stockholders overwhelmingly approved the deal last year, but the companies also needed approval from regulators in Kansas, Missouri and the U.S. government. The Missouri Public Service Commission has had hearings but has yet to rule.

In Kansas, the com-

panies could ask the state's appellate courts to overturn the commission's order. The companies said they were reviewing the order before deciding how to respond.

"We are disappointed with the order," said Chuck Caisley, a Great Plains vice president. "KCP&L and Westar have served customers in Kansas and Missouri for more than 100 years as neighboring utilities, and as a combined company we would create significant operational efficiencies and cost savings that would benefit our customers and our communities."

The companies have acknowledged the deal would lead them to trim their workforces, but they promised that Westar would retain its Topeka headquarters. They companies told the Kansas commission that they included more than 40 pro-

visions in their deal to protect consumers from the financial risks associated with it.

"We have been working really hard toward this transaction," said Westar spokeswoman Gina Penzig. "We think that it was going to bring a lot of benefits to customers."

Under the deal, Great Plains would acquire Westar's \$3.6 billion in debt, and critics argued that it would be paying as much as \$4.9 billion more than the book value of Westar's assets. The commission noted that in offering \$60 per share for Westar's stock, Great Plains was promising to pay \$4 more a share than another bidder.

Critics also said achieving the promised savings in operating costs would require Great Plains to shutter generating plants and cut more than 600 full-time jobs by 2020.

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