"A BITTER WET-DRY FIGHT:" HOW AN INFANTRY REGIMENT INFLUENCED THE NEBRASKA PROHIBITION VOTE OF 1944

Lindsey Bauman

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS
August 2017

Committee:
Rebecca Mancuso, Advisor
Amilcar Challu
Benjamin Greene
This thesis examines the often-overlooked connection between the home front and battle front during World War II, specifically between Nebraska communities and the 134th Infantry Regiment, which was originally part of the Nebraska National Guard. The Allied Dry Forces of Nebraska petitioned to put a prohibition initiative on the state ballot during the election of 1944, while thousands of servicemen were overseas. This case study discusses the ways in which Nebraska residents and servicemen responded to it. Most significant was a petition from members of the 134th Infantry, which was sent to the Committee of Men and Women Against Prohibition to denounce the initiative due to the timing of its proposal. Already viewed as important figures in the war in Europe, their military service gave their voices more credence within the community. A vote against the initiative was portrayed by anti-prohibitionists as a way to support the troops, a resident’s patriotic duty during World War II. The servicemen became an essential point of contention and their unexpected involvement in the election ultimately resulted in a bitter struggle between individuals and organizations on both sides. This case study examines how their petition, as well as the letters of other servicemen, impacted the outcome of the vote on the initiative during the election in November.
To my parents, Julie and Darryl Bauman.

Thank you for your unwavering love and support.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It truly does take an incredible group of people surrounding you to accomplish a project of this magnitude. This thesis could not have been completed without the guidance and support of my advisor, Dr. Rebecca Mancuso. As my undergraduate thesis advisor, I developed a great respect for her tenacity in uncovering the often-overlooked stories within society and creatively bringing them to life. That has only increased as I worked with her at the graduate level. She encouraged my interest in this topic from the very beginning and was always available to help me talk through the more complex aspects of it.

Dr. Amilcar Challu’s recommendation of the master’s program is what resulted in me applying to begin with. Without that initial interest, I may never have had the incredible experiences it has offered, nor stumbled across this topic and written this case study. As a reader, he brought a fresh perspective and often challenged me with angles that I had never considered.

The expertise of Dr. Benjamin Greene was invaluable to this project’s success; his knowledge of and guidance concerning both the battle front and home front during World War II was indispensable. He also recommended the use of one of my primary source sets and without that this case study would be nowhere near what it is now.

Dr. Ruth Herndon’s consistent interest and encouragement in this project, as well as my entire graduate career, cannot be overlooked. I came away from her classes as a better writer with broadened ways of thinking. Our conversations over cheese and chocolate were some of my favorite and most intellectually stimulating moments in the history department.

When considering the success of this thesis, Professor Carol Singer’s willingness to help locate sources was vital. Despite the fact that, at one point, she told me that the lack of sources
made it seem like the initiative had never existed, she helped me continue to persevere. During one of our meetings, we troubleshooted phrasing and were able to find more documents by changing a few words. Without that, a good portion of my source sets never would have been found.

I was lucky enough to enter the master’s program at the same time as Allison Nelson and Mike Horton, two incredible historians-in-training in their own right. While the program has never been easy, these two made facing and conquering its challenges much more bearable. Our meetings, dinners, and conversations were highlights of my experience at Bowling Green State University and were essential to my success.

Finally, it would be remiss of me to overlook the importance that my family has played throughout this process. They fostered my interest in history from a very young age. I fondly remember sitting around my grandparent’s kitchen table, asking questions about our family history, as well as U.S. History, and receiving patient and in-depth answers. As I grew older, I would show up with pen and paper and jot down notes as I listened so I could craft them into narratives when I went home. My love of uncovering documents was developed shortly thereafter, as I searched for sources that would answer questions on topics they were unfamiliar with. Watching documentaries with my father on the weekends, particularly on World War II, was another staple of my childhood.

All of these formative moments helped me develop into who I am today, both as a researcher and writer. Over the course of the last two years, my family’s support has never faltered. My parents in particular have made themselves available to listen, brainstorm, and proofread. In some of the more chaotic moments, they gave the seemingly simple yet important advice to take a break and eat something; my work would still be there when I got back. Their
encouragement and understanding have been irreplaceable on this journey; I could not have done it without them.
### TABLE OF CONTENTS

**INTRODUCTION** ................................................................................................................. 1

**CHAPTER I. A SILENCED REGIMENT: THE 134TH INFANTRY IN THE HISTORICAL NARRATIVE** ......................................................................................................................... 10
  - Fitting the Master Narrative...................................................................................... 13
  - Opportunities for Inclusion: Battle Front and Home Front ................................. 20

**CHAPTER II. “BEFUDDLING IS LIQUOR ISSUE:” THE INITIATIVE AND THE PUBLIC’S IMMEDIATE REACTIONS** ................................................................. 25
  - A Brief History of Prohibition .................................................................................. 26
  - Launching an Initiative ............................................................................................. 29
  - The Opposition Organizes ......................................................................................... 33
  - The Public’s Initial Opinions ..................................................................................... 37

**CHAPTER III. “IN OUR BOOTS:” NEBRASKA SERVICEMEN RAISE THEIR CONCERNS** ......................................................................................................................... 44
  - Problematic Timing for Servicemen ......................................................................... 47
  - Opposing Views ......................................................................................................... 58

**CHAPTER IV. “AN UNPATRIOTIC ATTEMPT TO DISRUPT THE FIGHTING FRONT:” THE BOILING POINT OF THE 1944 ELECTION** ................................................................. 64
  - The Boiling Point ....................................................................................................... 66
  - Election Day and Its Results ...................................................................................... 74

**CHAPTER V. CONCLUSION** .............................................................................................. 78

**BIBLIOGRAPHY** .................................................................................................................. 82
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Photographs of Irvin R. Null from World War II</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Votes on Nebraska Prohibition</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1890 Vote Count Comparison</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1916 Vote Count Comparison</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1934 Vote Count Comparison</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1944 Vote Count Comparison</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This thesis was not the outcome I expected from the original research project that spawned it. Prohibition was nowhere on my mind when I first approached the topic of the 134th Infantry Regiment and I never anticipated this to be my thesis at all. It actually began as a genealogy project on my great-grandfather, Irvin R. Null. Not from Nebraska himself, he was a replacement from Ohio who served in Company K of the 134th Infantry during 1945.

Irvin R. Null was born on March 28, 1911 to Riley Null and Gertrude Longnecker. Raised in Whitehouse, Ohio, he attended school until the seventh grade, when he decided to start working to help support the family. He was a truck driver for the majority of his life, but his last place of employment prior to enlisting in the United States Army was Champion Spark Plug in Toledo. Three days after his thirty-third birthday, Null entered into active service at Fort Thomas in Kentucky. As an automatic rifleman, he joined the 134th Infantry towards the end of the Ardennes Offensive in mid-January 1945. He predominantly saw action in the Rhineland and Germany and was wounded in his right knee and ankle in late March. He

---

2 “Death Certificate.”
4 “Death Certificate.”
5 “Army Separation Qualification Record.”
7 “Honorable Discharge.”
8 “Honorable Discharge.”
9 There is some discrepancy in the exact date that he was wounded. While the General Orders, which awarded him a Purple Heart, listed March 27, he listed it as March 30 on his discharge papers. However, it is likely that he was wounded on the 27th, as he was listed as wounded but remaining on duty from March 29 to March 30 on the Morning Report for April 5. To view these documents, see: “General Orders Number 26,” Headquarters 35th Infantry Division (April 12, 1945), 8. Accessed via the 134th Infantry Regiment website, http://www.coulhart.com/134/index.htm; “Honorable Discharge”; and “Morning Report,” Company K, 134th
remained in Europe until early September, when he and the remaining men of the 134th Infantry were transported back to the U.S. on the RMS *Queen Mary.*

Figure 1: Photographs of Irvin R. Null from World War II

Bonnie J. Bauman, my grandmother and Null’s daughter, has worked tirelessly with my grandfather, Darryl K. Bauman Sr., to research the history of their families. One of the things that originally led to my interest in history as a child was listening to their findings as they traveled to locate documents. While she had numerous binders with primary sources that established a timeline of her family’s past, my grandmother still had not requested her father’s

---

service record from the U.S. National Archives and Records Service. Knowing how important this was to her, as well as to my family as a whole, I requested it myself in mid-2015. I had very limited memories of my great-grandfather and, at the time, I was only aware of fragments of information about his service. Personally, I saw this as an opportunity to try to reconnect with someone who was gone.

Unfortunately, the National Personnel Records Center in Overland, Missouri experienced a fire in 1973. Although fires had destroyed historical records in the archives before, none of them were as devastating as the one on June 12.\textsuperscript{11} Eighty percent of Army records from 1912 to 1960 were lost as a result and my great-grandfather’s record happened to be one of the files that was damaged.\textsuperscript{12} Although they still had his discharge papers, as well as the papers he filed later in life for disability services, there was a gaping hole in the narrative of his service.

This did not satisfy my need for information, so I immediately began searching for more. This was when I stumbled across the 134th Infantry Regiment Website. With the help of the resources on the website, I was able to roughly reconstruct parts of his service narrative. While these sources maintain a heavy military focus and, therefore, leave out the majority of the human experience of combat, they helped add more substance to my understanding of the 134th and my great-grandfather’s experiences in it.

Although I was glad to have compiled these sources, this still was not enough for me. I started collecting books on World War II, searching for any references that I could find. Unfortunately, there was not much information on the 134th Infantry in secondary sources. This


roadblock served as a starting point for a seminar paper, which is when I stumbled across the prohibition initiative and the regiment’s petition in a newspaper report. That project morphed into the beginning of this study and ultimately led to a largely overlooked thesis topic.

I hope that this case study not only works towards filling an absence in the historical record, but also to more positively represent the perception of genealogy. Genealogy is often viewed by scholars in academia as an endeavor taken on by amateurs. When discussing the rise in interest in the subject following the creation of Alec Haley’s *Roots*, Gail R. Redmann claims, “Despite the similarities in the interests, and often the methodologies, of professional and amateur family historians in the 1970s, their research was rarely considered equivalent by archivists and librarians.”

Local history has often been similarly perceived by those in the historical profession; it has been viewed as nothing more than nostalgic and biased. This case study is an example of how extensive family research can lead to the discovery of a topic, which can eventually become a local history project with quite a bit of significance. A local, micro-view of a community and its residents is not always a detriment. It can have the potential to shed light on areas of history that have long been forgotten, despite their importance to a town, state, or country.

---

INTRODUCTION

A bitter fight was mounting from summer to winter of 1944 and it had little to do with the events taking place in the war raging across Europe and the Pacific. In the absence of Nebraska servicemen, well-organized dry forces were attempting to pass a prohibition initiative banning alcohol from being manufactured, sold, or used in the state. This was supposed to be the beginning of a movement to reestablish it nation-wide. However, servicemen that were fighting overseas recalled that their own fathers had returned to a dry Nebraska and many were vehemently against going through the same thing. Wanting their voices to be heard, many of them wrote home in order to share their opinions. This included 312 men serving with “Nebraska’s Own” 134th Infantry Regiment. The unit had been part of the Nebraska National Guard prior to its mobilization in 1941 and many of those serving in it, particularly in the beginning of the war, were from communities across the state. This group of servicemen organized a petition against the initiative and, by doing so, were effectively dragged into the crosshairs of “a bitter wet-dry fight.”

The 134th Infantry Regiment was not the only military unit that became involved in the issue. Individuals serving in other army regiments, as well as other military branches, wrote home to local newspapers in order to voice their opinions. They overwhelmingly made reference to World War I, when national prohibition had been passed while servicemen were overseas and many were unable to have their voices heard. Drawing this parallel helped many of them more

15 “The Case Against Prohibition” (Lincoln: Committee of Men and Women Against Prohibition, 1944), 23.
firmly establish their discontent in the situation and resulted in a call to action for those at home. After explaining their concerns, they often either implied or outright stated that the public should not vote for the initiative.

These letters were used as a major point of contention by the Committee of Men and Women Against Prohibition and its leader, Keith Neville. Interviews, propaganda, and advertisements were used to emphasize the community's patriotic responsibility to the servicemen. They argued that residents should vote against the initiative in order to protect the rights of those serving overseas, who some believed would have a difficult time voting in the election. In response, the opposition began questioning the authenticity of the letters. Harold D. Wilson, leader of the Allied Dry Forces, even went so far as to imply that Colonel Butler B. Miltonberger, commander of the 134th Infantry, should be court martialed for his involvement in the regiment's petition. This sparked outrage within the community and was another talking point used against the initiative leading up to the November ballot initiative. Although there were other reasons Nebraska residents may have voted against the prohibition initiative, the patriotic connection between the servicemen and the community had a hand in helping to defeat it during the election of 1944.

The 134th Infantry has largely been overlooked in historical scholarship and their involvement in the election of 1944 has been disregarded altogether. There has been a tendency in the field to reinforce the same figures, units, organizations, and events, creating a somewhat repetitive master narrative of American history. While patriotism is often a part of American identity, so is a collective memory of historical events. John Tosh claims, “For any social grouping to have a collective identity there has to be a shared interpretation of the events and
experiences which have formed the group over time.”18 In this case, the United States has tended to view historical events through a master narrative based on similar interpretations. While these interpretations generally shift over time, typically there are still common denominators within these narratives. While some events and figures may be featured consistently, others remain ignored.

In terms of World War II history, this typically consists of the same battles, military units, and leaders being represented in much of the literature. Historians writing about prohibition tend to focus on the historical record prior to World War II. Many end with the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment despite the fact that local movements towards prohibition existed long after that. Researching this topic helped emphasize the silences in the historical record and raised quite a few questions. While these elements may be considered more important by historians, who and what determines that? What does this tendency towards repetition do to the historical narrative? Does the master narrative overlook the importance of what may be found in areas outside of it? Do historians have a responsibility to try to step outside of it? This thesis addresses these questions and builds on the established master narrative.

More than anything, this thesis serves as a case study of Nebraska and its residents during this specific point in time, one year during World War II, concerning this specific issue, the prohibition of liquor trafficking. Zaidah Zainal argues, “Case study research…allows the exploration and understanding of complex issues.”19 By “allow[ing] a researcher to closely examine…the data within a specific context,” this method of research has enabled the assessment of

---

complicated community issues, connections, and discourses concerning this one topic.\textsuperscript{20} It allows for a study that reaches across the country and the world, as Nebraskans remained linked to their state of origin while serving overseas in the armed forces.

The topic of a prohibition movement during World War II, paired with citizens and servicemen reacting to it, also allows for an analysis of local history. This approach is often looked down upon as narrow or limited in relevance, but as Joseph A. Amato reasons, “Local history takes form around the wish to document single episodes, which often teem with worlds of meaning.”\textsuperscript{21} Although this study still connects in many ways to the overarching themes represented in the master narrative, it allows for a closer examination of those themes as well as expands on them. Constance McLaughlin Green argues, “For any true understanding of American cultural development, the writing and study of American local history is of primary importance. There lie the grassroots of the American civilization.”\textsuperscript{22} By examining the 134th Infantry and Nebraska residents in terms of how they reacted to and shaped the initiative, this study sheds light on important areas of American culture during World War II.

In attempting to do this, the lack of secondary sources that meshed exactly with this topic made it a bit difficult to reconstruct the events surrounding the initiative. This made finding and relying on primary sources even more crucial. Unfortunately, pieces of campaign propaganda were difficult to come by. Only one pamphlet from the Committee of Men and Women Against Prohibition could be accessed for this study, but its twenty pages provide ample information concerning their arguments against the initiative. Several advertisements were printed in local

\textsuperscript{20} Zainal, “Case Study as Research Method,” 1.
\textsuperscript{21} Joseph A. Amato, \textit{Rethinking History: A Case for Writing Local History} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pg. 5.
newspapers as well, which help demonstrate what they concentrated on and how they represented it in local media. Finding propaganda used by the Allied Dry Forces was a challenge; none could be found in the time allotted for this study. This has made it a bit difficult to truly represent their mindset and handling of issues.

The majority of this analysis relies on newspapers, which provide coverage of both groups, local servicemen, and the Nebraska general public. Three local Nebraska newspapers were instrumental in the reconstruction of this narrative, as well as in the argument put forward. All three come from areas of differing population size. The *Beatrice Daily Sun* was published in a town that had a population of 10,883 in 1940, while the *Lincoln Journal* was published in a city of 81,984. The final local newspaper that was a major contributor to this project was the *Omaha World-Herald*, published in a city of 223,844. They each provide different levels of local news coverage during 1944.

While all three of these were excellent resources, the *Omaha World-Herald* included an element that was nowhere to be found in any other newspaper source that was accessed for this project. When printed, the Sunday edition of the newspaper was divided in half. The top half of the paper targeted their typical audience on the home front, while the bottom half targeted their audience on the war front. These two sections were divided by a dotted line and provided instructions on how to cut out and piece together this “Service Edition.” When constructed, it formed a miniature version of the newspaper and could fit into an envelope to be sent overseas.

23 A few other local publications are featured as well, including the *Daily Nebraskan* and the *Plattsmouth Journal*, but these were not as influential in this study as the three listed above.
24 David J. Drozd and Jerry Deichert, “Table 15: Nebraska Place Populations: 1860 to 2000,” *Nebraska Historical Population Report*, pg. 83-90. Based on Decennial Censuses taken by the U.S. Census Bureau, compiled by the Center for Public Affairs Research at University of Nebraska at Omaha. Accessed via the Digital Commons at University of Nebraska Omaha, http://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/cparpublications/.
While most of the major storylines from the previous week are included, the language within the articles changes a bit and directly addresses servicemen in some cases. For example, one article run in the “Service Edition” on July 2 stated, “We’ll soon know if we’re going to vote on prohibition again in Nebraska while you boys are away at war.”\textsuperscript{26} In comparison, the article that it was based on read, “Wilson’s group is seeking to dry up Nebraska while many men are away in military service.”\textsuperscript{27} Although this is a fairly minor shift, it does show that the newspaper was aware of its different audiences and this knowledge clearly influenced its format and content.

The London edition of the \textit{Stars and Stripes} was also a key source for this thesis. This newspaper is different from the previous three in that it is a newspaper of and for the U.S. military. Several editions were published weekly in the European and Pacific Theaters during World War II.\textsuperscript{28} Like the “Service Edition” of the \textit{Omaha World-Herald}, service men were the intended audience of the newspaper. These differences in priorities impacted the stories that were covered, as well as the way in which they were featured.

Several military record collections were used in this study as well, specifically when discussing the 134th Infantry’s involvement in the European Theater. The 134th Infantry Regiment Website was instrumental in accessing these records, as they have preserved many of them digitally and posted them online for easier access. These record groups include after action reports and unit journals. Personnel rosters were also used when identifying the men who signed the petition against the initiative.

\textsuperscript{26} “We’ll Soon Know If There’ll Be Dry Vote,” \textit{Omaha World-Herald} (Omaha, NE), July 2, 1944. Accessed via the Omaha World-Herald Archives, http://www.omaha.com/archive/.
As mentioned previously, the 134th Infantry Regiment and the Nebraskan prohibition initiative have largely been overlooked in secondary sources. However, that does not mean that elements of these topics have not been featured in scholarship. Chapter I explores the many areas of historiography this event could fall into. In doing so, it points to the places in the master narrative that have ignored the 134th Infantry's involvement and importance. This primarily includes historical narratives focused on U.S. military service in the European Theater and the home front. This chapter will help establish what has already been written on these subjects and how this study adds to these bodies of knowledge.

Chapter II introduces the Allied Dry Forces and key spokesman Harold D. Wilson, as well as their initial efforts to place the initiative on the 1944 ballot. It also highlights the beginnings of discontent in the community over the issue, which eventually led to the creation of the Committee of Men and Women Against Prohibition. This chapter examines the beginning tensions between both factions, as well as the general arguments made for and against the initiative.

This establishes the foundation for Chapters III and IV, which delve into patriotism and how it was associated with military service during World War II. They examine the arguments of servicemen who weighed in on the issue and how those arguments were used to further the movement against the initiative. They also feature opposing views within the community, as well as the retaliatory actions of Wilson in response to the 134th Infantry's petition, the resulting fallout, and the outcome of the election.

While the discourse surrounding this initiative grew intense, this was not the first time that prohibition was on a Nebraska ballot. It had made three appearances prior to 1944, two of which were in attempts to establish state-wide prohibition and one to repeal it. Each time that
prohibition made an appearance on the state ballot, there was at least one other issue being voted on as well. The tables provided in Appendix A compare every year’s set of issues by the number of total votes cast for each one. In all four cases, more people voted on the prohibition issue than any other issue on the ballot. Figure 2 compares the number of votes cast for each piece of prohibition legislation presented to the people of Nebraska. Over 397,000 Nebraska residents voted against the prohibition initiative on November 7, 1944, more than had voted to repeal prohibition in 1934. This suggests that the issue was still significant in Nebraska communities in 1944.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election Year</th>
<th>Type of Legislation</th>
<th>Votes For</th>
<th>Votes Against</th>
<th>Total Votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>Constitutional Amendment to Establish Prohibition</td>
<td>82,292</td>
<td>111,728</td>
<td>194,020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td>Constitutional Amendment to Establish Prohibition</td>
<td>146,574</td>
<td>117,132</td>
<td>263,706</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>Constitutional Amendment to Repeal Prohibition</td>
<td>328,074</td>
<td>218,107</td>
<td>546,181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>Initiated Law</td>
<td>130,947</td>
<td>397,190</td>
<td>528,137</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: Votes on Nebraskan Prohibition

The filing of the initiative led to a string of bitter remarks from both sides of the issue, which may have been part of the reason why so many went to the polls. The involvement of the servicemen unwittingly resulted in another level of arguments against the initiative, based largely on the community’s connection to those serving overseas. Voting against the initiative was portrayed as their patriotic duty by anti-prohibitionists and played a role in Nebraskans effectively defeating the initiative in November. Perhaps more significant, despite the remaining
apparent sentiment of some to see a return to prohibition in the state, this was the last time that
outright liquor prohibition of any form was on the ballot state-wide.\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{29}“Statistics on Constitutional Amendments, Initiated and Referred Measures,” compiled by the Nebraska State
CHAPTER I.

A SILENCED REGIMENT:

THE 134TH INFANTRY IN THE HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Following the Ardennes Offensive in December 1944 and January 1945, Major General M. S. Eddy wrote that the 35th Infantry Division’s record in Europe “has been a distinguished one.” This sentiment continued throughout the remainder of the war, as Major General Butler B. Miltonberger later “declared Nebraska’s ‘own’ 35th infantry division has made a record in the war that will live as long as democracy lives.” Despite these statements, the division has largely been ignored in the master narrative of World War II. As scholars, authors, and Hollywood have evaluated the stories of men and women who served their country, there has been a tendency to focus on certain units over others. Many of these interpretations are very much in the public eye, which serves to influence the ways in which Americans of the past and present have thought about World War II. The scholars and playwrights creating this media have become at least partially responsible for shaping how those in the general public view the war as a whole. And yet, despite the length of time that has passed since the end of the war, there are still areas of silence within the general narrative of World War II.

Many of these absences in the historical record concern individual military units. While some have been represented repeatedly in scholarship and other forms of media, others have been overlooked. One such silence surrounds the 134th Infantry Regiment, a unit within the

35th Infantry Division, which was involved on the home front and in the European Theater from the bombing of Pearl Harbor until V-J Day. Through research into this body of scholarship, it appears that only two works focus primarily on this regiment’s service, both of which were written by veterans of the unit. Their involvement in the home front, particularly during the election of 1944 through Nebraska’s prohibition initiative, has also gone unrepresented in the historical narrative. Why has this regiment’s story largely gone unnoticed by those outside of it? Are there a lack of sources to help guide researchers’ work? Do historians, as well as the general public, simply assume that this story is merely a repetition of those that have come to light before it? Why should this regiment be featured in the scholarship of World War II? Although the experiences of the 134th Infantry Regiment tend to reinforce and parallel larger themes associated with the combat history of World War II, there are numerous areas of silence concerning these unique experiences, as well as others in the larger narrative of the conflict.

When the United States was founded, those in power “saw the problem of education as a political question and treated it as a phase of public policy. Education in their view was a means of preserving liberty, securing unity, promoting good citizenship, and developing the resources of the land and people.” This notion is still alive and well today. From the time that students enter the educational system, they are taught about U.S. History in a certain way. They receive information through a lens that is prescribed to them by the state government, the school board, and their teacher. Their interpretations of history and, more specifically, World War II are

---

33 I examined four U.S. History textbooks that were published between 1995 and 2003, two for elementary and middle schools and two for high schools. All four were fairly consistent in the events that they included that concerned American involvement in the European Theater. Most prominent were Pearl Harbor and the Normandy Invasions, which were mentioned in all four textbooks. The fall of Berlin was mentioned in three textbooks, while the campaigns in North Africa and Italy and the Ardennes Offensive were each mentioned in two. Other events were mentioned concerning American involvement in the Pacific Theater, but because the focus of this case study is primarily the European Theater those are the events I concentrated on in my evaluation. This sample of textbooks
directly influenced by the representations that have been presented to them. Some representations of World War II have become even more entrenched in the public consciousness, largely due to popularized historical representations in books and films. Works such as Stephen E. Ambrose’s *Band of Brothers* or *Saving Private Ryan*, also affect the general public’s perceptions associated with the general narrative of World War II.

Within these narratives, there are typically certain elements, like people, places, and events, that are consistently reinforced. This results in the creation of a master narrative. History is the recording and interpreting of a broad timeline of experiences, but within this timeline there are specific elements that are featured more prominently in education and scholarship than others. Because of their frequent appearance, they tend to become markers of importance along the span of the timeline. The importance assigned to these elements depends on a powerful group’s interpretation and consensus. Nevertheless, because these elements have been consistently reinforced, they become the broad strokes of a master narrative, or “a narrative that cannot be easily interrupted, revised, or seized, but only, in certain moments, replaced.”

These elements are often presented through the powerful majority’s perspective and have traditionally left out minorities. There has also been a tendency to present “great man history,” by focusing more on the perspectives of influential male leaders, rather than on the average citizen and very rarely on marginalized peoples.

But as military historians have discussed combat history and the experiences of those on the front lines, it is interesting to note that certain units appear repeatedly, while others are rarely

---

referenced at all. The 35th Infantry Division and 134th Infantry Regiment are only two examples of this. By examining key elements within World War II scholarship, it is easy to see where they could fit into the discussion. The lack of representation indicates a silence within the scholarly conversation that must be more fully examined.

**Fitting the Master Narrative**

The 134th Infantry Regiment started the 1940s associated with the Nebraska National Guard. After being “called into Federal service” in January 1941 and training at Camp Joseph T. Robinson in Arkansas, the regiment was involved in protecting southern California’s shoreline following the bombing of Pearl Harbor.35 After reorganizing and training at Camp San Luis Obispo, California and Camp Rucker, Alabama, the regiment took part in Tennessee maneuvers in November 1943. The official record of the division recounts, “It was cold and wet and under the most unfavorable weather conditions the Division engaged in two months of realistic battle problems, two months of conditioning for combat that earned the 35th the commendation of the Second Army directors of the exercises.”36 When the division moved on to Camp Butner, North Carolina, the 134th and 137th Infantry Regiments went to West Virginia. After learning how to scale cliffs, as well as other training procedures, they rejoined the rest of the division.37

Like other prominently-featured units, the 35th Division embarked for England and were assigned to the Third Army under General George S. Patton Jr. Although they did not take part in the D-Day landings on June 6, 1944, they were called upon in July to help “in the buildup of the Normandy beachhead.”38 Even though they did not take part in the initial invasion, this does

---

36 “Chapter I,” *Presenting the 35th Infantry Division*.
37 “Chapter I,” *Presenting the 35th Infantry Division*.
not mean that there was little importance to their arrival on European soil. Their original
departure date was suddenly moved up with little warning. “The short notice, – about five hours
– the wide dispersion of the troops, separate movements of organic vehicles by highway, and
foot troops by rail, all combined to make this the most difficult administrative move in the
Battalion’s career.”

Martin Blumeson’s _The European Theater of Operations: Breakout and Pursuit_
examines the events directly following the D-Day invasions. Despite the fact that mobilization
into Europe was such a significant milestone for the regiment, he overlooks it in favor of giving a
broader overview of the situation. As this is one of the U.S. Army’s “Green Books,” its official
history of World War II produced in the 1990s, this silence seems especially significant. The
Army portrayed what it felt to be important for its own history, but neglected to represent one of
these larger milestones. This almost seems to erase the regiment’s presence within the
mobilization process completely.

Having successfully mobilized, the 134th Infantry landed on Omaha Beach nearly one
month after it had been taken by Allied forces. Serving under then Colonel Miltonberger, they
were the first soldiers from the 35th Division to set foot on the beach. In a letter to his parents,
Sergeant Lloyd Hubbard wrote, “Our trip across the channel was an unforgettable experience,
one I’ll never forget. Someday I’ll tell you all about it. […] Most of us are glad to finally be able
to do our share of the fighting.”

---

40 Martin Blumeson, _Breakout and Pursuit_, vol. 5 of The European Theater of Operations subseries of the United
41 “Sgt. Hubbard Writes of 134th Infantry,” _Beatrice Daily Sun_ (Beatrice: Nebraska), August 7, 1944. Accessed via
Following the invasion, the 134th Infantry Regiment was also engaged in the Battle of Saint-Lô, another often-referenced conflict. During the battle, the 134th fought side by side with the 29th Division, one of the units that has been more prominently featured in the literature of World War II. They replaced a portion of the 29th Division’s line on July 13 and began their assault on Saint-Lô on July 15. The process of seizing the town was difficult. The regiment was forced to endure hand-to-hand combat in order to seize the town of Emelie along the way. They also had to take Hill 122, which consisted of “a long series of gradually elevated plateaus across which were fields, sunken narrow roads and hedgerows, all excellent for defensive positions held by the enemy, standing as the dominating terrain feature before St. Lo.” After a fierce struggle with dug-in machine gun and mortar fire, the 134th finally entered the town from the north on July 18, just as the 29th Infantry Division entered from the east. One day later, “the 134th relieved the elements of the 29th Infantry Division and completed the occupation of St. Lo.”

In a letter home, Staff Sergeant Charles Young wrote of his experiences in the 134th Infantry Regiment, Company C, describing the following:

Yesterday morning the division cut in front of us and thank God we were left behind. We have been fighting for 21 straight days. I am quite sure we have seen and had it all happen to us. The one who said war was hell was just putting it mildly. It all started the morning of the 15th when we started the attack on St. Lo. One division had tried three times to take it and were driven back. We took it O.K. for on the night of my birthday, the 17th, I stood on the hill and watched St. Lo burn. Those are two days I’ll never forget. We took the town but, oh, the price we had to pay. I can not [sic] tell the names of the boys; they will be in the Sun before long. There are so few of us left you would never know it was Co. C.

Our company spearheaded the attack. It was one big nightmare and we are trying to forget it all. I am quite sure I don’t know why I am still here; we can thank God I was hit by shrapnel twice but wasn’t hurt.

---

42 “Chapter II,” *Presenting the 35th Infantry Division.*
43 “Chapter III: The Battle of St. Lo,” *Presenting the 35th Infantry Division.*
44 “Chapter III,” *Presenting the 35th Infantry Division.*
The vivid imagery that Sergeant Young’s letter gives a more personal view of the action that took place during the conflict. It also presents the reader with the mentality of a single soldier as they recalled the experience of combat. Already physical and psychological exhaustion seemed to be hampering those on the front lines. As the Division set out on its campaign across northern France, Sergeant Hubbard wrote “We have taken Cherbourg, Caen, St. Lo, and now after they cut off the Brest peninsula we will beat a direct path to Paris and then to Berlin. I pray several times every day that this mess will end very soon.” Like Young, Hubbard appeared exhausted with the experiences of war.

Shortly thereafter, the 134th Regiment “earned signal honors” for its actions in the conflict. This was followed by the division’s first Distinguished Unit Citation, which was awarded to the First Battalion of the 134th Regiment. It read:

> The magnificent gallantry, heroism, teamwork, and will to win displayed by the 1st Battalion, 134th Infantry Regiment, in this crucial operation characterized by countless deeds of individual and group heroism, and its tremendously significant part in the action on Hill 122 at the approaches to St. Lo, contributed immeasurably to a major victory for the United States, and reflects the highest credit on the character and training of the officers and men of this unit.

While the language tends to romanticize combat and the experiences that were endured, it does serve as further evidence of just how important the 134th Regiment’s actions were, even viewed by those outside of the division. These achievements were covered outside of the United States as well. The *Stars and Stripes*, a newspaper in London, reported that the 134th Regiment

---

46 “Sgt. Hubbard Writes of 134th Infantry in France.”
“distinguished themselves” by spearheading the assault on Emelie and capturing the town nine hours later.49

Despite the clear impact that the 134th’s actions had on the outcome of the Battle of Saint-Lô, many works that discuss the conflict leave them out of it. Both David M. Kennedy and Stephen E. Ambrose name the 29th Division as being key to the capture of Saint-Lô.50 While this is true, only representing a single division and its involvement skews the interpretation being presented to the reader. Despite not being linked directly to the invasion of Normandy, Saint-Lô is referenced in Barrett Tillman’s D-Day Encyclopedia as well. In his preface, he explains, “Some later segments of the Normandy campaign are included for continuity, such as the Falaise gap and the capture of such vital cities as Saint-Lô, Caen, and Cherbourg.”51 As expected, the discussion of Saint-Lô is brief. The only mention of a specific U.S. Military unit comes in the final paragraph, when Tillman writes:

On 18 July the U.S. Twenty-ninth Infantry Division launched a battalion of the 116th Infantry in the final thrust against the town. By then the buildings had been flattened and most of the ten thousand inhabitants had fled. However, the assistant division commander, Brig. Gen. Norman Cota, raised the colors, and Saint-Lô was liberated.52

Like Kennedy, this source only gives a limited account of the Battle of Saint-Lô and only touches upon a few specific units that were involved in the action.

In contrast, the “Green Book” that includes the Battle of Saint-Lô does include the actions of the 35th Division. The 134th is specifically referenced in regards to its capture of Emelie. The text states:

52 Tillman, D-Day Encyclopedia, 297.
The 134th Infantry moved toward the cluster of farm buildings at Emelie behind a rolling artillery barrage. Almost immediately the men became enmeshed in a tangle of hedgerow lanes and a shower of enemy fire. The threat of confusion hovered over the battlefield as small units fought for individual fields. Although the regiment suffered high casualties in severe splinter actions, it had the hamlet of Emelie by noon.\(^53\)

The 35th Division is also referenced prominently in the section that discusses Hill 122, which was the region where the actions of the First Battalion earned its Distinguished Unit Citation.\(^54\) Because of that achievement, it is not surprising that it would appear in the Army’s official history.

The discussion of the events surrounding the Normandy Operation within scholarly and popular historical accounts tend to be focused on other military units. This tendency is paralleled in the representation of the Ardennes Offensive, commonly referred to as the Battle of the Bulge. As part of Patton’s Third Army, the 35th Division was involved in coming to the aid of encircled airborne divisions in the vicinity. When recounting the events in a letter, Colonel Miltonberger wrote, “As a matter of interest our 1st Battalion was the first infantry into Bastogne to relieve the airborne people. It was a sharp fight.”\(^55\) Mail clerk T-5 Albert D. Sage agreed with Miltonberger’s assessment of the fighting, writing, “This war is getting tough; the Jerries are fighting to the last man.”\(^56\)

The fighting conditions were not the only element of the situation that made it difficult. A few of the letters published in local newspapers describe the weather conditions, which has

\(^54\) Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit*, 159-163.  
\(^55\) Other reports at the time suggested that the 4th Armored Division was actually the first infantry unit to reach the 82nd Airborne Division, who were in the same general vicinity as the 35th Division at the time. This is reinforced by coverage of the events in the “green book,” *The Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge*. Nevertheless, the 134th Regiment was heavily involved in the conflict. For more on Miltonberger’s perspective, see: “134th Aided Lost Division.” For more on the 35th Division’s involvement, see: Hugh M. Cole, *The Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge* (Washington D.C.: Center of Military History, 1993), 606-648.  
been another dominant theme in the writings on the Ardennes Offensive. In early December, Sage recalled, “We are not enjoying the weather too much at the present time, but being inside I am a lot better off than a lot of the other boys and I am thankful for it. […] Yes, Mother, the front line soldiers do stay outside a lot. It is tough but they keep going on and little by little we are getting farther along the line.”57 These documents provide a deeper understanding of the personal, day-to-day struggles that were experienced by those on the front lines.

There are also stories of desperation laced with determination as American soldiers fought to survive in the bitter conditions. One such narrative featured Privates Eugene J. Feshal and Samuel B. Reichard of the 2nd Battalion, 134th Infantry Regiment. They spent seven days and nights “undetected in a slit trench six feet long by two feet deep,” completely separated from their regiment.58 When interviewed after the fact, Reichard recalled:

There were four Jerry machine-guns around us, pinning us down. One by one they were silenced by our mortars and artillery. Even though our shellbursts missed us by a minimum distance of ten feet, I was sure glad to hear our heavy stuff slam into those been living on our nerve, coaxing each other not to surrender, kidding ourselves that our battalion would be coming up any time. On our one-man patrols I got rations from a dead Joe and Gene picked up an Army-issue Protestant Bible from another Joe. The rations helped the first day – that and eating snow – but the Bible brought us through. I got a wife and two kids, with the third now overdue. We’d take turns reading and that’s what helped us to hold out.59

They eventually decided to walk back to Lutresbois in an attempt to reconnect with the 134th Regiment, “their hands overhead” so they would not be mistaken for the enemy.60 These stories of tenacity have featured prominently in the patriotic master narrative of World War II and it can be assumed that similar moments were experienced by soldiers fighting in every unit within

57 “GI’s Pranks Lift Morale.”
59 Mitchell, “7 Days in a Frozen Hell.”
60 Mitchell, “7 Days in a Frozen Hell.”
every branch of the military. Some stories have survived the test of time through their inclusion in scholarship, while others have been left in the archives.

In the “Green Book” focused on the Battle of the Bulge, the 134th Regiment and 35th Division are most prominently referred to in their taking of Lutrebois. At the time, the 35th Division was “filled with untrained replacements” and “was attacking without its usual supporting battalion of tanks.” Despite these odds, the 134th and 137th Regiments took the town over the course of December 28 and 29. The Germans did not let it go easily though and assaulted the town on the following day. The official history reads:

The battle in and around Lutrebois [on December 30] was then and remains to this day jumbled and confused. There is no coherent account from the German side, and it is quite possible that the formations involved in the fight did not…co-operate as planned. The American troops who were drawn into the action found themselves in a melee which defied exact description and in which platoons and companies engaged enemy units without being aware that other American soldiers and weapons had taken the same German unit under fire.

This passage corresponds nicely with the confusion of battle, which led to Feshal and Reichard’s experience described above.

*Opportunities for Inclusion: Battle Front and Home Front*

As has already been shown, there are multiple entry points for the 134th Infantry Regiment and 35th Infantry Division to be included in the master narrative of World War II. Simply reinforcing the master narrative may be redundant and arguably unwarranted, but there are different ways of examining and interpreting evidence that could benefit the overall scholarship of the period. As different generations of historians approach the subject of World War II, they bring with them different life experiences influenced by the culture in which they live. These experiences help them raise new questions. For example, Kenneth D. Rose

---

deconstructs the social history of Americans in his book *Myth and the Greatest Generation*. Concentrating on four main areas, the battle front, the home front, American culture, and the end of the war, he humanizes the experiences of those who lived during World War II. This makes for a unique examination that touches on areas within the master narrative but interprets them in a diverse way.63

Similarly, Carol Reardon offers a different way of deconstructing soldiers’ experiences. She argues that four prominent questions have recently entered into the historiographical discussion of World War II. They are “1) Who served – and who did not serve – in the American armed forces? 2) Why did they serve? 3) How did soldiers adjust to military service, especially the anticipation of combat, its trauma, and its aftermath? 4) How did military service shape soldiers’ lives after they returned to the civilian world?”64 Even if the subject matter seems to reinforce the master narrative, these questions help guide different methodologies and shape arguments, which can then lead to new ways of interpretation. Case studies can also lead to better understanding of elements of war that scholars are already studying.

There are opportunities for studying the regiment that fall outside of the typical examinations of World War II as well. There is a strong community tie that comes through the letters and newspapers from the time period. There are multiple instances of soldiers including small asides in their letters where they discuss how they are still receiving their local newspaper while serving overseas. Even an ocean away, they were still connected to what was happening at home. This is showcased best through one of the key international and national stories concerning the 134th Regiment. While serving in Europe, many of the soldiers decided to

---

become involved in a debate concerning prohibition in Nebraska during the war. The *Stars and Stripes* reported, “A full-page political advertisement quoted members of Nebraska’s 134th Infantry as protesting against the Dry’s campaign being conducted while they were in France. Their Colonel Butler Miltonberger signed the protest.” This spurred controversy in their home state, as the leader of the Dry movement claimed that Miltonberger had given away military secrets in the letter that accompanied the protest. Despite the dispute, the proposal was voted down in November.

The bonds of community traveled across the Atlantic with members of the 134th in other ways as well. Many of them served with each other or near each other and letters printed in the *Beatrice Daily Sun* consistently mention the interaction of “Beatrice boys.” While in France, Sergeant Gail M. Searcey wrote, “[The *Sun*] tells me that there are many fellows from around Beatrice here in France now. I haven’t seen any of them so far. In twenty-five months, I have seen only two Beatrice fellows.” There was a clear desire for a connection between those from the same region, a unifying element that can be traced back to their towns in the United States.

But as the war continued and casualty counts increased, one of the companies in the 134th Regiment suffered severe losses. On December 8, T-5 Albert D. Sage wrote, “I spent the afternoon over at ‘C’ company with some of the Beatrice boys; that is what is left of them. We were all talking about it; there are only three men in the company that are original National Guard soldiers.” Following the Ardennes Offensive, even Colonel Miltonberger stated, “Most of the old timers are gone but we go on somehow. We’re still trying to live up to the regiment

---

68 “GI’s Pranks Lift Morale.”
motto, ‘All Hell Can’t Stop Us.’” Despite losses to their numbers, those communal connections still served to unite them. These community connections, from ties to the home front to ties on the battle front, could offer a different way of examining the experiences of soldiers in combat. They could also reinforce broader understandings of their experiences through a case study of a unit that is often excluded from the master narrative.

The Normandy Operation and the Ardennes Offensive have been covered numerous times in the scholarship of World War II. Despite these conflicts being repeatedly discussed and interpreted in different ways, the stories of certain units have been favored over others. Part of this could be due to the overall purpose of the texts. Covering every single division that was involved would be impractical, largely because it could potentially shift the original focus of the project. Nevertheless, the tendency to feature the same units across the spectrum of scholarship still raises a few questions. Why have historians tended to focus on some military units over others when there is clearly evidence that depicts the importance of those which have been left out? Is it something as simple as a lack of interest? Are there a lack of sources, in comparison to source sets featuring other units?

Regardless of the answers, the legacy of World War II has largely been shaped by a general understanding of which events were construed as being important. While military historians have begun to look at war in different ways, there are still omissions in the record that need to be told. As veterans of World War II are lost each year, the importance of collecting and analyzing as much information as possible cannot be overstated. While World War II veterans are still alive, we have the unique ability to ask questions and seek out answers from those who

69 “134th Aided Lost Division.”
experienced the front lines first-hand. Like a puzzle, each story has a piece to offer to the greater narrative of World War II. While it will never be fully completed, there is something to be said for attempting to piece together as much as possible.

The master narrative of World War II has become something like an aged photograph. Taken at a specific place, time, and event, certain units are represented in the snapshot. Their placement in the foreground or background, in the center or along the edges, or outside the scope of the camera’s lens, dictates how they are represented or even if they are included at all. Whether or not this has happened on purpose or due to coincidence remains to be seen. What truly matters is the acknowledgement that certain units have been left out of the general narrative of America’s involvement in World War II.

---

70 While it must be acknowledged that oral history may not be one-hundred-percent credible, there are ways of looking deeper into the stories that are gained through this method. Triangulating sources can help interviewers uncover bias within the collected oral narratives.
CHAPTER II.

“BEFUDDLING IS LIQUOR ISSUE:”

THE INITIATIVE AND THE PUBLIC’S IMMEDIATE REACTIONS

The issue of prohibition had long been a part of Nebraska society. As early as the mid-nineteenth century, citizens were engaged in the back and forth surrounding the legalization of liquor and liquor trafficking. Following the passage of the Twenty-First Amendment in 1933, which ended national prohibition, the issue heated back up again. The opinions of those in favor of it mixed with the opinions of those against it, creating a bitter back-and-forth between those heavily involved in the movement. This simmering situation boiled over in 1944, when the Allied Dry Forces, formerly known as the Anti-Saloon League, petitioned for the inclusion of a prohibition initiative on the November ballot.

Following their success in gaining enough signatures to do so, members of the Nebraska community became quite vocal in their support or opposition of the initiative. They sent letters to editors of newspapers and became involved in the discourse surrounding the issue. Several anti-prohibitionist organizations were formed as well, most prominently the Committee of Men and Women Against Prohibition. This development was taken in stride by the Allied Dry Forces; they encouraged individuals and organizations to share their concerns so they could respond to them. However, the relationship between the Allied Dry Forces and the Committee of Men and Women Against Prohibition and their techniques to gain political support would go

---

71 Their change in name shows how the organization incorporated the U.S.’s wartime associations into their branding.
on to impact the outcome of the election. Their strained beginnings, as well as the tense words shared between citizens, foreshadowed the political struggle that would emerge as the election of 1944 drew closer.

A Brief History of Prohibition

In his book *Hellfire Nation*, James A. Morone claims, “Across American time, nothing rallies the people or expands their government like a pulpit-thumping crusade against social injustice.” He argues that questions of morality and whether or not they should be addressed in government policies has become a cornerstone of American society, as anxiety over moral decline has become inextricably linked with national identity. “Morality helps Americans answer those subversive questions at the heart of every community: Who are we? Who belongs?” In political terms, Morone explains, “We strip moral inferiors – witches, slaves, drinkers, crackheads – of their rights. To win back those rights, simply reverse the process: cry out that good people face injustice.” This trend can be seen within the political episode that took place in Nebraska during 1944, as well as the history of prohibition in the United States more generally.

As early as the mid-nineteenth century, “dry reformers were convinced that the permanent improvement of American society required the extinction of the liquor traffic.” They believed that, in order to make a profit, the liquor industry was trying to manipulate the

---

75 Morone, *Hellfire Nation*, 3-4
77 Morone, *Hellfire Nation*, 4.
American people to drink more alcohol. If the U.S. was ever going to become a sober nation, liquor trafficking needed to be their main target.79

However, Nebraska’s first law concerning liquor was already quite stringent. When it became a territory in 1854, legislators adopted the civil and criminal code of neighboring Iowa. This included the prohibition of “manufacture, sale, and consumption of intoxicating beverages.”80 Although it was replaced by a license law in 1858, the battle between wets and drys dates back to the beginning of the state’s history.81 It was brought up again during the Constitutional Convention of 1871, when state legislators met and developed five propositions concerning social and political issues of the time. One of the propositions had to do with reestablishing prohibition, but when the revised constitution was rejected by voters all of the propositions were rejected as well.82

In 1916, dry forces had a prohibition amendment placed on the Nebraska ballot. While it passed by a large margin, the state legislature lost sight of the issue as the potential for U.S. involvement in a world war became more likely. They never enacted a law to fully implement the amendment.83 This turned out to not be an issue, however, as prohibition gained public attention once the U.S. entered into World War I. Rationing resources was of the utmost importance, inspiring Congress to issue a temporary prohibition measure in April 1917 in an effort to conserve grain. This was followed by the passing of the Eighteenth Amendment in December 1917, which established permanent prohibition nation-wide.84 Although residents of

79 Kerr, Organized for Prohibition, 13.
80 James C. Olson and Ronald C. Naugle, History of Nebraska (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 91.
81 Olson and Naugle, History of Nebraska, 91.
82 Nebraska Blue Book 1970, compiled by the Nebraska Legislative Council (Lincoln: Capitol Printing Company, 1970), 57.
83 Olson and Naugle, History of Nebraska, 256.
Nebraska had technically already passed prohibition in their own state, Nebraska’s importance in the national ratification process cannot be overlooked. “On January 16, 1919, [it] became the thirty-sixth state to ratify the national amendment, ensuring its enactment.”\textsuperscript{85}

However, the passing of a law did not guarantee its effectiveness. By the early 1930s many Americans had realized that prohibition was unenforceable, at least in its current state.\textsuperscript{86} The Eighteenth Amendment was nationally repealed through the Twenty-First Amendment in 1933 and by the state legislature in 1934.\textsuperscript{87} In the aftermath of the Prohibition Era, Thomas M. Coffey described the negative consequences:

The federal government alone had spent $129 million in the attempt to enforce it. Ninety-two federal agents and 178 civilians had been killed in acts of violence against each other. More than a half-million people had been convicted in federal courts for offenses against the liquor laws. In addition, millions of others had repeatedly broken these laws, thereby encouraging in themselves and the people around them a diminution of respect for all law. And billions of man-hours had been wasted in the continuous fourteen-year debate between the wets and drys – a debate in which each side poured forth upon the other a constant deluge of misinformation, delusion, and deceit.\textsuperscript{88}

He cited the substantial losses that the nation had experienced throughout the 1920s and 1930s, including those of monetary value. Coffey also addressed the increase in crime and arrests, which had resulted in a loss of manpower. To him, the downfalls of prohibition seemed obvious.

However, this was not the case for everyone. Although prohibition was abolished, this did not result in the dry forces disappearing. Organizations such as the Anti-Saloon League and Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) remained vigilant for opportunities through which they could reenact prohibition legislation. For Nebraska, this came to a head in 1944.

\textsuperscript{85} Andersen, \textit{The Politics of Prohibition}, 270.
\textsuperscript{87} Nebraska Blue Book, 59.
Launching an Initiative

As Americans dealt with the continued fallout of entering another world war, “the political sphere grew increasingly contentious. […] While solidarity in the struggle against the Axis powers remained intact from beginning to end, there was growing polarization over domestic issues.”

Although citizens were focused on winning the war, they were also concerned about what the post-war world would look like. Guided by their opinions on social issues, they cast ballots in 1942 and 1944 that reinforced their priorities.

For the Allied Dry Forces of Nebraska, this meant trying to ban statewide liquor trafficking, which they believed would be the best cure for alcoholism. Following “a majority vote at the annual meeting in Lincoln in February,” as well as the approval of the headquarters committee, attorney general, and secretary of state, the group decided to attempt placing a prohibition initiative on the November ballot. They developed what they felt was a beneficial liquor policy for the state and had it officially drawn up by a committee of lawyers. In three sections, they outlined their goals:

1. Manufacture, sale, transportation, importation, possession and use of intoxicating liquors as a beverage would be prohibited.

2. Penalty for violation of the act would be a fine not exceeding five hundred dollars or imprisonment in the county jail for not more than six months, or both.

---

91 Prior to renaming themselves, the Allied Dry Forces were part of the Anti-Saloon League, a national organization founded in 1893. For more on the Anti-Saloon League, see: Donald Barr Chidsey, “The Man Who Passes the Collection Plate,” *On and Off the Wagon: A Sober Analysis of the Temperance Movement from the Pilgrims through Prohibition* (New York: Cowles Book Company, Inc., 1969), 57-62 and Kerr, *Organized for Prohibition*, 66-274.
3. Repeal of Chapter 116, laws of 1935, and all amendments.\textsuperscript{95}

They later removed the second point regarding potential punishments. Following its approval by all of the trustees,\textsuperscript{96} it was filed with Secretary of State Frank Marsh in March.\textsuperscript{97}

In order for the initiative to be placed on the ballot, two criteria had to be met. First, they had to acquire “at least 26,496 valid signatures on a statewide basis, this being 7 per cent of the total vote for governor in the last election.”\textsuperscript{98} Second, they had to “qualify at least 38 counties by having valid signatures equaling 5 per cent of the total vote for governor in the counties.”\textsuperscript{99}

The Allied Dry Forces had attempted to meet these requirements in 1942. The amount of signatures submitted had looked promising at first, but upon checking them they ended up falling short “due to duplication and improper listing of names and address [sic].”\textsuperscript{100} Not only was their campaign in 1944 designed to prohibit the trafficking of liquor, but to gain redemption for their loss in 1942.

As the Allied Dry Forces began knocking on doors and asking for signatures, the first altercation between prohibitionist and anti-prohibitionist forces hovered on the horizon. Charles A. Sandall, State Director of the Nebraska Committee for the Brewing Industry Foundation, raised his concerns regarding a return to prohibition. He based his comments on his time as Nebraska’s Federal Prosecuting Attorney during the Prohibition Era and six years of working with the committee.\textsuperscript{101} During his time in office, he recalled that “people just thought that all


\textsuperscript{96}“Befuddling is Liquor Issue.”

\textsuperscript{97}“Befuddling is Liquor Issue.”


\textsuperscript{99}“Drys Qualify 38 Counties.”

\textsuperscript{100}“Dry Deadline Advanced Day.”

that was necessary to enforce prohibition was to have a law passed.” He worried that the initiative that could potentially be brought to Nebraska voters was making the same mistake. In looking at its components, he noticed that the Allied Dry Forces were planning on repealing the current liquor laws but no longer provided any penalties for violators in their own. If the initiative passed, it would then be up to state legislators to take the appropriate steps to develop penalties themselves. However, this would take time. Sandall predicted:

Nebraska would become a bootleggers’ paradise for six weeks to six months, the period depending on whether the governor called a special session and the time required by the senators to pass an enforcement act. During the ‘twilight period,’ there would be no penalty for selling liquors to minors, for intoxication, or for drinking in public and on the highways.

Where the initiative was trying to prohibit liquor trafficking, Sandall believed it would do just the opposite in the days immediately following its instatement.

His predictions caught the attention of Harold D. “Three Gun” Wilson, Executive Director of the Allied Dry Forces of Nebraska and avid prohibitionist. Wilson responded to Sandall’s charges, claiming that he was “trying to ‘make a mountain out of a molehill. City ordinances would take care of enforcement until new state laws could be enacted. We didn’t want to complicate the question for the voters by including enforcement clauses in our petition.’”

This immediately gained a rebuttal from Sandall. He agreed that the Twenty-First Amendment was designed to ban the importation of liquor into dry states, but argued that its

102 “State Liquor Law Praised.”
103 “Prohibition’s Chance Good, Drys Believe.”
104 “Prohibition’s Chance Good, Drys Believe.”
105 “Prohibition’s Chance Good, Drys Believe.”
107 “Prohibition’s Chance Good, Drys Believe.”
inclusion of the phrase “in violation of the laws thereof” kept it from doing so in Nebraska’s case.  He also claimed, “I called Wilson’s attention to this as early as last April, but no effort has been made to correct the dangerous situation.”  Wilson released a statement shortly thereafter, declaring:

Judge Sandall is trying to make much ado about nothing and seems to be openly admitting the traffickers in intoxicating beverages are so lawless that only drastic regulations can keep them from being an irresponsible gang of bootleggers.  His statement sounds very much like an ultimatum to the people of Nebraska, that ‘you play ball our way or else.’  Personally I do not like this threatened method of blackjacking and do not believe the good citizens of Nebraska will approve of such hijacking methods.

This discourse, labeled “befuddling” by the local newspapers, seemingly ended as quickly as it began as media coverage shifted towards the approaching deadline for submitting the initiative petition.

Nearly a week in advance, Wilson showed optimism when asked if he believed the initiative petition would be accepted.  Despite “wet weather…hampering petition circulation in many sections,” Wilson expected them to meet the required number of signatures.  Their last attempt was not far from his mind though, as he had set out to overshoot the requirement by five to ten thousand.  He did not want what occurred in 1942 to happen again.

Following three months of asking for signatures, Wilson officially filed the petitions with the secretary of state on July 6, just “a half hour before the 5 p.m. deadline.”  When submitted, they carried over 50,000 signatures, well over the 27,000 needed.  During the verification

---

108 “Befuddling is Liquor Issue.”
109 “Prohibition’s Chance Good, Drys Believe.”
110 “Befuddling is Liquor Issue.”
111 “Befuddling is Liquor Issue.”
112 “Dry Deadline Advanced Day.”
process it was found that they had met each of the requirements set, qualifying 77 counties and validating 47,949 signatures.\(^{115}\) The prohibition initiative would be placed on the November ballot, the only one in the United States during 1944. The Allied Dry Forces had already achieved what they had been unable to two years prior and it had gained the attention of prohibitionist leaders across the country. At a convention, the national president of the WCTU, D. Leigh Colvin, declared that “if prohibition [was] brought back in Nebraska, the same thing would be attempted nationally.”\(^{116}\) The results of the prohibition initiative had just been placed on the national stage.

*The Opposition Organizes*

The initial reports that the prohibition initiative would almost assuredly be placed on the November ballot were released on July 19.\(^{117}\) By July 24, an opposing organization had gone public. Called the Committee of Men and Women Against Prohibition, they “[believed] in temperance and in strict control of the liquor business.”\(^{118}\) They would go on to become the “principal opposition” of the Allied Dry Forces in their bid for statewide prohibition.\(^{119}\)

The group was managed by John B. Quinn, former Deputy Secretary of State, and led by Keith Neville who had been the governor of Nebraska during the Prohibition Era.\(^{120}\) Upon forming the group, Neville released the following statement to the press:

---

\(^{115}\) This was the final official count, as approved by the office of the secretary of state. For the full article, see: “Signatures Assure Vote on Prohibition,” *Omaha World-Herald* (Omaha, NE), Aug. 2, 1944. Accessed via the Omaha World-Herald Archives, http://www.omaha.com/archive/.

\(^{116}\) “A Foot in the Door.”


Practically speaking, prohibition does not prohibit. That has been proved in Nebraska, in many other states and in many other countries. Prohibition merely makes the business illegal and therefore tax exempt and it creates a chaotic condition of law violation, including all the evils of bootlegging. I was governor in 1917 when Nebraska went dry. I observed first-hand the confusion, the law violation, the loss of tax revenue and all the other evils that accompany prohibition.121

Quite a bit of it focused on loss in taxes, which had been heavily experienced during Prohibition. It also referred to a report released from Nebraska Tax Commissioner Robert Armstrong nearly two weeks prior.

Armstrong had revealed just how much tax revenue was being gained by the state through their current legal code. The tax on liquor was providing over $1,850,000, equaling about 36% of assistance funds annually. Considering the federal money that went towards matching the amount, Armstrong estimated that the state would lose nearly four million dollars per year.122 Liquor licensing fees went towards Nebraska schools as well, which would result in an annual loss of about $1,000,000.123 Based on these estimates, Neville ultimately concluded, “I believe prohibition was distinctly harmful to Nebraska and I don’t want it to happen to our state again.”124 In response to the group’s creation and Neville’s statement, Wilson claimed that the Allied Dry Forces were “delighted that they have come out in the open so quickly, so that we can answer their arguments.”125

True to Wilson’s implication, the anti-prohibitionist forces swiftly began making their concerns known. The discussion concerning lost tax revenue became a key argument, being covered by the media into late August. Traveling to speak in front of different organizations, Quinn argued, “We place ourselves in an idiotic position when we consider voting out legal

121 “Neville Heads Anti-Dry Unit.”
122 “Property Tax Hike Opposed.”
123 “Property Tax Hike Opposed.”
124 “Neville Heads Anti-Dry Unit.”
125 “Neville Heads Anti-Dry Unit.”
liquor and substituting illegal liquor which brings no revenue to the state.”126 In October, an advertisement published in newspapers asked readers, “YOUR CHOICE: Which Shall It Be?”127 Beneath the question, twenty-four potential scenarios were presented as examples of legal business versus business under prohibition. Through the choices provided, readers were encouraged to vote against the initiative.128 There were also several pages dedicated to this in a pamphlet mailed out to residents, titled “The Case Against Prohibition.” With headlines like “TAX LOSSES to illegal traffic would be enormous,” “The COST of PROHIBITION is Huge TAX LOSSES,” and “NEBRASKA’S Helpless and Young are the Direct Beneficiaries of Legal Alcoholic Beverage TAXES,” they had the potential to make quite an impact on readers.129 Overall, they reinforced the idea that prohibition would help “keep the underworld’s tax-free, illegal business alive.”130

The Committee of Men and Women Against Prohibition were also clearly disturbed by the amount of crime they perceived to be part of dry regions. They cited a study of penitentiary records, which showed that 185 Nebraskans had been charged with first and second degree murder during the 18 years the state had experienced prohibition. In comparison, only 45 people had been charged with similar crimes in the nine years since prohibition had been abolished.131 Neville believed that this was ample evidence “that the dry era bred crime and lawlessness.”132 Calling on memories of the past, Quinn stated, “The motion-picture style bootlegger is out-of-

128 “Your Choice.”
132 “Dry Period Slayings Cited.”
date, but in his place is a cold-blooded syndicate of gunmen who are ready to dominate Nebraska’s illegal liquor business if the people of this state are indifferent enough to permit passage of the prohibition law.”

In connection with potential corruption, they reiterated Sandall’s original concern regarding a period of lawlessness immediately following the initiative’s approval. Quite simply, they believed that most local police forces would not be capable of fighting such a significant outbreak of crime.

Another argument they made relied on the claim that “prohibition [went] against the general concepts of our Government [sic] and personal freedom.” Wilson claimed that it “[tried] to regulate personal habits and tastes by law,” which he felt was “a form of tyranny.” On several occasions, the Committee of Men and Women Against Prohibition framed the issue as “a fight for personal freedom – your personal freedom.”

Finally, they pointed to the official national stance of the Anti-Saloon League that had been issued early in 1943. While the Allied Dry Forces did not share the same name, they did share the same origins. The Committee of Men and Women Against Prohibition sponsored a newspaper advertisement that reproduced the document in full. While the prohibitionist organization had not given up on their belief in eventually prohibiting liquor trafficking nationwide, they stated, “We deem it unwise and unnecessary to raise the controversial and divisive issue of national prohibition at a time when unity is most needed.”

---

133 “Quinn Fears Booze Ring.”
134 “‘No Quarrel with Drys.’”
135 “Quinn Fears Booze Ring.”
136 “‘No Quarrel with Drys.’”
137 “Neville Heads Anti-Dry Unit.”
138 “The Case Against Prohibition.”
was created in order to convince readers that this was an acceptable reason to vote against the initiative, even if they did not personally approve of the use or manufacturing of liquor. 140

The Allied Dry Forces and Committee of Men and Women Against Prohibition were two of the major factions involved in the Nebraska prohibition campaign of 1944. They and their leaders, particularly Harold D. Wilson and Keith Neville, would be at the center of the bitter fight between prohibitionists and anti-prohibitionists as it ensued for the next four months. However, they were not the only ones who shared their opinions on the issues surrounding the initiative. The general public was also extremely vocal throughout the campaign, leading to increasingly vicious bouts of discourse.

*The Public’s Initial Opinions*

By October, the Republican Party of Nebraska had released a statement on their neutrality concerning the prohibition initiative. A. T. Howard, chairman of the party, argued, “It is something for the voters to decide and is not, as far as the GOP is concerned, a political issue.” 141 That did not keep voters on both sides from providing their own perspectives on it. The responses of the general public were as mixed as those involved in the prohibition movement. Many of their opinions were shared in letters written to newspaper editors, which were published daily in the *Omaha World-Herald*’s “As the Public Pulse Beats.”

Many of them were in response to claims made by the Committee of Men and Women Against Prohibition and written in support of the initiative. Betty Chipman of Omaha took issue with their view on the rise in crime rates during the Prohibition Era. She wrote, “As far as prohibition not working then: the reason why it didn’t wasn’t because of the law itself – it was

---

140 “The Anti-Saloon League is Not Uniting in Appeal for Enactment of War-Time Prohibition by Congress at This Time.”
because of the ineffectiveness of the enforcers of the law."\textsuperscript{142} She believed that this was who was responsible for the crime rates, not the creation of dry regions themselves.

Fay A. Puckett of O’Neill reacted to their argument concerning rises in liquor trafficking, despite the illegality of distributing it. She wrote:

The liquor interests tell us that “there is no such thing as voting a nation, a state or even a community dry.” That if people “can’t buy legally they will buy it illegally.” To say that is to say that sugar, meats, gasoline, etc. can’t be rationed because people will have what they want regardless of law or governmental authority. It’s further admission that the liquor menace is a greater threat to our country than Hitler and Tojo.\textsuperscript{143}

She believed that the attitude people had towards restricted goods, where they would find a way to buy regardless of the legality of those actions, was evidence that American society was perhaps even more problematic than most residents believed. She went so far as to parallel them with two of the factions that the United States was fighting against in World War II.

Similarly, Carl G. Bader reacted to several of the Committee’s arguments, claiming that “ex-governor Keith Neville […] exhumed all the false arguments against liquor prohibition.”\textsuperscript{144} He cited four quotes that Neville had made in recent weeks and added his own interpretations afterward. For instance, when discussing the Committee’s concern over a loss in tax money, Bader added, “Is anyone ignorant of the fact that the liquor traffic increases public expense at least 30 times as much as it pays in taxes?”\textsuperscript{145} This allowed him to compare his own opinions to those being perpetuated by the Committee of Men and Women Against Prohibition in a public forum, where he may have hoped to sway voters. Following his examination of several key arguments, he concluded, “Born in Nebraska, I witnessed conditions before, during and since

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{145} Bader, “As the Public Pulse Beats.”
\end{flushleft}
prohibition. Of the three, prohibition was the best era, despite deliberate revolt by the ‘respectable’ traitors; and the repeal era is the worst, from the standpoint of decency, in our history. How long are the morally inferior to be permitted to rule?”

Although his reasoning slightly differed from Puckett’s, Bader believed that those against prohibition were corrupt and problematic as well.

Margaret Wilcox of Alma came to a similar conclusion regarding the present conditions in Nebraska. Arguing against the liquor laws that were already in place, she stated, “There never was a time in the history of the liquor business when liquor was sold more perniciously than it is sold in most towns and cities in Nebraska. The old saloon was a credit to the way it is sold today.”

Unlike the anti-prohibitionists, she believed that liquor trafficking was much worse post-Prohibition than during it. She warned, “If the interests do not want Nebraska to vote dry they must find a better way of distribution and put some teeth in the laws to protect our youngsters.”

In direct opposition to Wilcox’s comments, James Luce of Omaha believed that the Prohibition Era had been much worse. In part, he wrote:

So the ‘drys’ are about to resurrect the putrid corpse of prohibition. Have the drys forgotten the terrible days of 1919 to 1933, have they forgotten the Al Capones, Dutch Schultzes and thousands of other little and big gangsters who by reason of prohibition set up empires bigger than the government? […] God forbid the return of the days of 1919-1933 – the darkest days in the history of America.”

146 Bader, “As the Public Pulse Beats.”
148 Wilcox, “As the Public Pulse Beats.”
In agreement with the Committee of Men and Women Against Prohibition, he argued that prohibition had only led to more crime and more illegal liquor trafficking. He believed this helped contribute to making what he considered to be the worst period in American history.

George W. Olsen, who was running for Governor of Nebraska in 1944, opposed the prohibition initiative for a different reason. He stated, “Regardless of what appears to be best for the public, the fact remains that we are in the midst of a busy war, and no question that causes dissension and strife among us should be brought upon us in war time.” Although his own personal opinions on the issue were a bit muddled, he clearly believed that this was not the appropriate time to address it in an election. Supporting the war effort was his priority and that included avoiding anything that may disrupt maintaining a united front. As prohibition was such a contentious issue, he felt that it had the potential to do just that.

Several other residents reasoned that temperance was a better solution to alcoholism than outright prohibition. Clay Center resident Will M. Maupin wrote, “Most of the advocates of prohibition I know put their advocacy upon moral or religious grounds. Holy writ admonishes us to be temperate in all things. Temperance does not mean total abstinence.” His assertion provided another angle to the religious grounds on which some prohibitionists supported the initiative. Others related it to the protection of individual freedoms, like Mrs. A. F. Lindan of Wahoo. She stated, “Prohibition is another extreme which should be avoided, with strict control substituted. Education and religion should teach knowledge and self-control, but freedom preserved at all cost – freedom under the law.”

One woman in her seventies, a former employee of the WCTU, was so against the initiative that she became involved in creating a new anti-prohibitionist organization. When Ida M. Thurber made her negative opinions known on the Allied Dry Forces’ proposal, the WCTU had fired her.\(^{153}\) She was disheartened by the situation, as she believed that a number of other people in the organization felt similarly. The anger inspired from her poor treatment resulted in the conception of the Nebraska Temperance and Tolerance Organization.\(^{154}\) By election day, she had gained over 700 members.\(^{155}\)

The organization had two main goals, the first of which was “to teach temperance and tolerance and to fight any move that [would] return to Nebraska the gangster days of prohibition.”\(^{156}\) She believed that temperance was a more realistic policy than prohibition, particularly when it had gone so poorly when it was in place. To help her spread her message, Thurber reached out to ministers who felt that a return to prohibition would be detrimental to Nebraska. She claimed, “These men are going to vote ‘No’ Tuesday, not because they believe in drink, but because they know the law proposed by Wilson and the Allied Dry Forces would bring only confusion.”\(^{157}\)

Thurber’s second goal through the Nebraska Temperance and Tolerance Organization was “to keep small pressure groups from taking advantage of the absence of Nebraska men and women to promote their own ideas at the expense of those fighting for American ideals.”\(^{158}\) She stated her reasoning in the following statement:

\(^{154}\) “Ousted Dry Plans Group.”
\(^{156}\) “Ousted Dry Plans Group.”
\(^{157}\) “Ousted Dry Plans Group.”
\(^{158}\) “Ousted Dry Plans Group.”
I campaigned for prohibition during the last war and remember how mad our fighting men were when they returned and found such an important issue had been decided in their absence. Accordingly, I oppose voting on prohibition in the November election because more than 100 thousand of our men and women are out of state and will not have a chance to express themselves.¹⁵⁹

Thurber was not the only one to come to this conclusion; the idea resonated with others. The Committee of Men and Women Against Prohibition listed this as their first concern in a statement released a day before the election, claiming that it was “unethical and unsportsmanlike” to put the issue on the ballot while service personnel were overseas.¹⁶⁰ They argued, “We object because this issue is being raised when these Nebraskans are not able to participate in free debate and discussion on a matter that affects their future, both from the standpoint of taxation and from the fact that one of their liberties they had when they left the state would be gone when they return.”¹⁶¹ This reasoning had also been one of the four reasons given by the Anti-Saloon League to not proceed with prohibition during the war.¹⁶²

These groups were largely correct in their concerns. Many servicemen found out about the initiative through correspondence or media coverage. Choosing to become involved in the issue, they wrote to their families and local newspapers in order to have their voices heard. Members of the 134th Infantry Regiment took it one step further, signing a petition against the initiative that would spark one of the most vicious episodes during the campaign. Despite the fact that Nebraska servicemen were seen as heroes by residents of the state, particularly “Nebraska’s Own” 134th Infantry, this did not mean that everyone agreed with their concerns.

¹⁵⁹ “Ousted Dry Plans Group."
¹⁶⁰ “Prohibition Cost is Told."
¹⁶¹ “Prohibition Cost is Told."
¹⁶² “The Anti-Saloon League is Not Uniting in Appeal for Enactment of War-Time Prohibition by Congress at This Time.”
The “war’s first crusade to restore prohibition” had already been built on the foundation of blunt discussion and this trend only continued as the election approached.\textsuperscript{163}

\textsuperscript{163} “Nebraska Prohibition? NO, Say GIs.”
CHAPTER III.

“IN OUR BOOTS:”

NEBRASKA SERVICEMEN RAISE THEIR CONCERNS\textsuperscript{164}

While Nebraska began debating the prohibition initiative, the 134th Infantry Regiment was fighting the Axis forces in Europe. Upon arriving in Britain they quickly discovered what war entailed, experiencing an air raid near where they were staying in Penzance prior to the D-Day invasions. In a letter, Corporal Donald E. Hardenbrook recalled, “One week after we were there, an air raid happened just up...the coast from us. We could see it well from Penzance. […] In the states we have no conception of the hardships of war.”\textsuperscript{165}

Although “the 35th Division had not participated in the ‘D’ Day assault landings on June 6th,” they had entered Europe through Omaha Beach shortly thereafter.\textsuperscript{166} Five days later, the \textit{Stars and Stripes}, the newspaper that soldiers in the 134th Infantry would have had the greatest access to, printed a short article about the filing of the prohibition petition in Nebraska.\textsuperscript{167} Although the 134th had a short period of no combat, they quickly became engaged in efforts to hold and advance the front line. Around the time that the article appeared, they were becoming involved in the Battle of Saint-Lô, a key objective in the defense of Normandy.\textsuperscript{168} While all three battalions faced heavy casualties during its fallout, the First Battalion suffered the most

\textsuperscript{164} Based on a quote from a letter printed in the \textit{Omaha World-Herald}. The writer, Charlie Blecha of the U.S. Navy Reserve, wrote, “I often wonder how these ‘drys’ would feel to come home to find a dry state and their jobs which they had counted on so heavily gone. Perhaps they’d feel different in our boots.” To read the full letter, see: Charlie Blecha, “As the Public Pulse Beats: What They’re Fighting For?,” \textit{Omaha World-Herald} (Omaha, NE), July 25, 1944. Accessed via the Omaha World-Herald Archives, http://www.omaha.com/archive
\textsuperscript{166} Huston, \textit{Biography of a Battalion}, 9-10.
\textsuperscript{167} “Nebraska Drys Seek State Vote.”
\textsuperscript{168} Huston, \textit{Biography of a Battalion}, 20-22.
severe losses. When asked how they were faring, a soldier simply responded, “Oh, they’re all shot to hell, sir.”

They became well-known by their superiors for their achievements in Saint-Lô, which ended in them assisting in taking one of the major objectives in the battle. They received a commendation for their actions, which read, “The capture of St. Lo climaxes an operation of major importance to the American cause, and brings to a successful conclusion the initial combat action of this division. It was marked by repeated instances of personal and group heroism of the highest order and has earned for you a place among the great organizations of American military history.” The regiment went on to take part in combat in Mortain, Montargis, and Joignay, as well as help liberate Nancy.

Their actions were consistently reported in local newspapers as the communities of servicemen followed their progress. Casualty reports lined front pages, alongside stories of the 134th's achievements. Correspondence from soldiers in the unit was often shared in the home community, including letters about battlefield experience and the comradery shared in the infantry.

Following their actions in Saint-Lô, Colonel Butler B. Miltonberger sent a copy of their unit’s commendation to Brigadier General Guy N. Henninger, State Adjutant General, and Governor Dwight Griswold. On the back, he wrote, “It speaks for itself. […] We never get out of the lines, so I don’t have much time, but you can be sure there will be more of these. When the story breaks you will see that it was this outfit that did the work.”

---

169 Huston, Biography of a Battalion, 25.
171 Huston, Biography of a Battalion, 25.
172 “Nebraska’s 134th ‘Did the Work’ in St. Lo Capture.”
173 “Nebraska’s 134th ‘Did the Work’ in St. Lo Capture.”
featured in the Beatrice Daily Sun and the Omaha World-Herald. A month later, Omaha World-Herald war correspondent Lawrence Youngman wrote an account of the combat they faced in Nancy, which was published in several newspapers as well. He stated, “It was the 134th regiment – Nebraska’s own – which liberated Nancy.” They became a symbol of local pride and patriotism for many in the state. By October, the Omaha World-Herald proclaimed, “Every Nebraskan should know about the 134th.”

Although it is unknown exactly when the servicemen in the 134th Infantry found out about the initiative, the reaction of members in Company L was first printed in the Omaha World-Herald on July 25. As a whole, the regiment allegedly came together following the Battle of Saint-Lô in order to draft a petition showcasing their dissatisfaction. They wanted their concerns to be heard, for people back home in Nebraska to understand their point of view. This was not unheard of; servicemen and veterans have been involved in American politics since the U.S. was founded. Upon further examination, Jeremy M. Tiegen claims, “Military service has always appeared to engender a special credibility in the American political milieu.” This was especially true in the years following World War I. Of 435 seats in the House of Representatives, sixty-three of them were occupied by veterans who had served overseas.

---

177 “Nebraska Prohibition? NO, Say GIs.”
Fifteen of ninety-five senators were veterans of the first world war as well.\textsuperscript{180} Servicemen and veterans also have powerful allies in their civil organizations. Stephen R. Ortiz points out, “The American Legion, Disabled Veterans of America, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) reached into the social fabric of every community and into the halls of Congress as powerful lobbyists.”\textsuperscript{181}

These themes of power, in terms of gained credibility through service and their civic organizations, were strongly represented in the events leading up to the election in 1944. Individual servicemen had been sending letters with their opinions since June and they had received several responses from community members following their publication. However, the portrayal of the 134th Infantry in local newspapers seemed to give them a great deal of credibility within the community; that they came together in large groups in a collective effort appeared to only increase that. Their involvement incited a more bitter side to the struggle and arguably made it an even more controversial issue than it had been before.

\textit{Problematic Timing for Servicemen}

One of the major points of contention that servicemen had with the prohibition initiative was the timing of the vote to decide its outcome. Many of them drew parallels between this and the creation of the Eighteenth Amendment during World War I. National prohibition had been established while soldiers were fighting in Europe and some felt that they were “unable to protect their rights” due to the timing of the vote.\textsuperscript{182} Some believed this to be unpatriotic, in that those serving their country and protecting individual liberties had been unable to use their own.

\textsuperscript{181} Ortiz, “Introduction,” 1.
Even before the initiative was approved to be placed on the November ballot, the press was emphasizing these similarities. The *Omaha World-Herald* featured an opposition group’s argument reinforcing this sentiment as early as February in the service edition of their newspaper. They stated, “The question must not go on the ballot until service men can vote on it.”183 By the time the Allied Dry Forces had gained enough signatures to put the initiative on the ballot, even prohibition leaders were becoming concerned over this. As reported in July, “[Some were] reported fearful [that] efforts to dry up the state while the soldiers are off to war will draw heavy criticism and may set the temperance movement back many years.”184 They “refused to go along in what they charge as a sly attempt to put over prohibition as was done during World War I while 100,000 Nebraska men were away from home.”185

This concern can also be found in the first petition developed by members of Company L. By late July, their letter had reached and been printed by the *Omaha World-Herald*. It read:

As members of the 134th Nebraska infantry regiment we wish to convey to the people of Nebraska through you how we feel about coming home to a dry state. We read in the Stars and Stripes [sic] that the allied dry forces of Nebraska have drawn up a petition signed by 50,393 citizens to place a dry vote on the November ballot. It is a little more difficult to vote in France than it is in Nebraska. Our time is too occupied with fighting for the freedom we left at home to seek out 50 thousand Nebraska boys to counteract that petition. Therefore we are asking you to take our part in what we feel is an injustice to all members of the allied expeditionary forces in France. We want to return to the same Nebraska we left and not to a state corrupted by the evils of prohibition.186

They connected their current location in war-torn France with the timing of the vote, claiming that this may cause them some difficulty in casting their ballots. They also pointed out that their responsibilities overseas make it difficult for them to collect signatures for their own petition.

---

183 “Drys Rallying for Prohibition.”
185 “Nebraska Prohibition? NO, Say GIs.”
The letter was accompanied by 54 signatures of Nebraska men serving with the company, many of whom were from Omaha and the surrounding area.187

This petition garnered an active response from seven former members of Company L. Reacting to the belief that most of the men who had signed it would be unable to vote, they “secured exactly 53 pledges to vote against prohibition in the coming elections.”188 In their statement to the *Omaha World-Herald*, they promised, “We shall attempt to influence several thousand more votes for ourselves and our comrades in France. [...] We are determined that no men, or group of men, shall deal off the bottom when we play the game, and we’re sitting in for our friends.”189 Although not immediate, the original petition from Company L arguably helped influence the election even at this relatively early stage.

This was the predecessor of the 134th Infantry’s larger petition, which was sponsored by Colonel Miltonberger. In a letter home, he wrote that “he had never seen his men so incensed over anything as they had been by the attempt to have a prohibition law approved by the voters at the November election.”190 He added “that he’d get ‘a nasty-worded petition against prohibition’ started just as soon as he could get away from the front and back to the rear lines.”191 He fulfilled this promise, collecting the signatures of 312 Nebraska men. After the process, Miltonberger recalled that it was not a happy occasion. “They were to a man mad and disgusted. They feel so helpless over a thing like this that their first impulse is to say: ‘To hell with it!’”192

---

189 “As the Public Pulse Beats: Pledge by Former Members.”
191 “Col. Miltonberger Says GI’s Are Angered with Prohibition Attempt.”
192 “A Petition from ‘Nebraska’s Own’ 134th Infantry.”
Like the original petition, at least part of the discontent showcased within the petition had to do with the timing of the vote:

We, the undersigned citizens of Nebraska, who are now serving in the armed forces in defense of our country, are dismayed to learn that those of us who survive this war may return to the kind of Nebraska that our fathers returned to in 1919. We feel that we are being disfranchised. Our minds are fully occupied with two propositions: to kill as many Germans as possible to the end that we may get home as quickly as possible; and to ourselves survive until we can get home again. We ask the people of Nebraska to see to it that the Nebraska we return to will be the same Nebraska we left when we entered the Armed Forces.¹⁹³

Due to army regulations regarding political issues, they had to leave out the word “prohibition.”¹⁹⁴ They used their fathers’ experiences as an identifying feature instead. The references to their service could have helped those at home connect to the infantrymen, as most on the home front probably knew at least one person serving their country.

“Soiled by the grime of the French battlefield on which it was signed,” the petition was sent to Keith Neville and the Committee of Men and Women Against Prohibition.¹⁹⁵ In the accompanying letter, Miltonberger wrote, “I am sorry there are no more names on the petition. Two things operated to make them hard to get: the first is that most of the Nebraska soldiers are wounded and in the hospital or killed; and second, we are very busy at the job of chasing Germans.”¹⁹⁶ The casualties that they had suffered throughout France hindered their efforts, as well as the fact that the 134th was still entrenched in fighting. Nebraskans, as a whole, were spread out all over Europe and the Pacific, making it difficult to have their voices heard in one united front. Neville quickly contacted the press and reports of the petition were published on

¹⁹³ “A Petition from ‘Nebraska’s Own’ 134th Infantry.”
¹⁹⁶ “A Petition from ‘Nebraska’s Own’ 134th Infantry.”
October 1. He reasoned, “There is only one use to which I can honorable [sic] put this petition: I must present it publicly to all Nebraskans. They are entitled to know just how Nebraska’s own service men feel about this vote behind their backs.”

This petition garnered another reaction from former members of the 134th Infantry. This time, it came in the form of a letter from ex-Corporal W. B. Straw, who had previously served in Company E. Addressing other former members of the regiment, he wrote, “Let’s keep the spirit of the old One Hundred Thirty-Fourth up and on November 7 vote the state so doggone wet that our fighting buddies can swim in it when they get home, if they want to.” While it may not have been of the same caliber as the pledges sought out by other former members, it did act as a call to action.

Despite the significance of their collective efforts to have their voices heard, the 134th were neither the only nor the first service personnel to react negatively to the prohibition initiative. Like the 134th, many serving overseas had discovered the initiative through newspapers or letters from home and were unhappy with what was taking place. The *Omaha World-Herald* printed quite a few letters from servicemen concerning this issue, which serves as a way to better understand their viewpoints. Serving in North Africa at the time, 1st Lieutenant R.N. Seiler referenced the vote during World War I in his letter. He wrote:

> I see by the “Stars and Stripes” news item that the drys are trying to put across prohibition again in Nebraska. Can this be true? If so, isn’t it a repetition of what happened back in 1918-19? […] Is this another stab in the back? We might expect such things from Japs or the krauts but certainly it is something we definitely do not expect from our own folks. Why not hold off on such drastic action until everyone, including us chaps overseas, have a chance to voice our sentiments by voting on such things? If it is government by the people, then why not include all the people and not just the stay at homes who remain safe and smug? […] If [prohibitionists] have no desire to drink

---


alcohol then let them abstain, but woe to these who would interfere with those same personal liberties and freedoms for which we have been sent so many thousands of miles to defend. There is no greater destroyer of army morale and faith in those we left behind than just such things as are brought out in this news.  

Lieutenant Seiler commented on the timing of the vote before comparing the actions of those behind the initiative to the betrayals of the Japanese and Germans. He also referenced elements of U.S. History that helped develop American ideals. This included part of the last line from Abraham Lincoln’s “Gettysburg Address,” which read, “…and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.” He used it in such a way that it questioned the intentions and morality of those behind the initiative, as he felt that they were disenfranchising the ability of servicemen to participate in elements of the election.

Sergeant Charles W. Daly had similar complaints in his letter, which was printed beside Seiler’s. While serving in Italy, he wrote:

In an issue of the Stars and Stripes Italy edition, I read with alarm that another fraud is being perpetrated against the people of Nebraska and, in particular, against its citizens serving in the armed forces. I refer, of course, to the plans of Herald D. Wilson and the prohibitionists. If the advocates of prohibition will play the game fair and square, if the prohibitionists will desist from working underhandedly in the manner of Germany, if Harold D. Wilson and his kind will wait until we, the defenders of their right to speak, return to our homes and loved ones, then and only then will I admit that we have not fought in vain. […] We insist that we should have a hand in planning for the wellbeing of America.

Like Lieutenant Seiler, Sergeant Daly related the actions of prohibitionists to the “underhanded” actions of Germany. He also argued that it is unjust that those who are overseas, working to protect individual liberties, may be unable to protect their own rights at home.

---

199 Seiler, “As the Public Pulse Beats: Stab in the Back.”
Both letters categorized the work of those behind the initiative as a betrayal to those serving overseas. This trend continued in a letter from Walter F. Voss, who, at the time, was serving in New Guinea with the U.S. Army.\textsuperscript{202} He stated, “It takes a pretty low man to stab a solider in the back while he is overseas.”\textsuperscript{203} Voss continued, charging Wilson with “trying to use the war to serve his own ends” and “taking advantage” of the servicemen.\textsuperscript{204} He believed these actions were underhanded as well, tapping into the votes of Nebraskans on the home front while discounting the fact that Nebraskans overseas may not be able to take part in the election as they would have liked to. Like those before him, Voss also questioned, “Why doesn’t he wait till we get back so we can have a voice in what we can or cannot have?”\textsuperscript{205}

Individuals serving in the army were not the only ones to respond negatively to the issue. Writing from Seguin, Texas, Army Air Force Captain George J. Dober found the timing of the vote to be unreasonable as well. He argued:

If this intended dry law is to be placed upon the ballot in the coming election it will certainly find many of our liberal voters in the army and navy who will be unable to get absent voter ballots in time to have their chance to decide for themselves what laws they wish to live under when they return to civilian life. Mail to some of our battle areas in this global conflict is indeed slow and months would be required to get an opinion from our boys who are fighting so bravely for this thing we call ‘Freedom.’”\textsuperscript{206}

What had only been implied by previous writers was clearly articulated by Captain Dober. Although servicemen were theoretically able to vote in the election, that did not mean that it would necessarily be possible. Several difficulties associated with being overseas and on the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{202} Voss notes that he found out about the initiative through the Service Edition of the \textit{Omaha World-Herald}, so residents in Nebraska were cutting it out and sending it to those they knew who were serving overseas.
\item \textsuperscript{204} Voss, “As the Public Pulse Beats.”
\item \textsuperscript{205} Voss, “As the Public Pulse Beats.”
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
front lines meant that everyone who otherwise may have voted on the initiative, had they been home in Nebraska, may not have had the opportunity to while serving in the military.

Serving with the U.S. Navy Reserve in Fort Pierce, Florida, Motor Machinist’s Mate, Second Class Charlie Blecha wrote home about his concerns as well. They are fairly similar to opinions already expressed by those who preceded him, likening it to “a slap in the back, like at Pearl Harbor.”

Taking it one step further, he asserted the following:

“It not only shows that our so-called ‘dry’ friends are taking advantage of our absence, but also that they can’t be spending all of their spare time working on the war effort. […] An act toward a person to his back displays cowardice; so why not get on the ball and give more aid to the war effort, thus insuring the quicker return of our boys so that they may have a direct part in the act. Probably then many of us would not have the tendency to ask, ‘Is this what we’re fighting for?’”

In this statement, Blecha took the implications of prohibitionists being unpatriotic to a new level. He suggested that they were obviously spending far more time on the campaign than on the war effort, despite the fact that the war effort should have been their priority.

With letters like this being sent to families and newspapers alike, it was clear that many in the service were unhappy with how the prohibition initiative was being handled. The local media began running articles on the “ominous chasm that is developing between the young Americans on the fighting front and their elders at home.” Writers at the Omaha World-Herald alleged, “To a youngster who has just looked at the hideous face of death it seems strange and almost unaccountable…that we stay-at-homes are capable of such small thoughts and doing such small things” as discussing and voting on statewide prohibition.

---

207 Blecha, “As the Public Pulse Beats.”
208 Blecha, “As the Public Pulse Beats.”
209 “Message from the Front.”
210 “Message from the Front.”
Following the publication of the petitions and several letters voicing their concerns, pieces appeared on the ethical questions involved in the timing of the vote. Reporters questioned the intentions of the Allied Dry Forces, inquiring, “Was this an honorable move to secure an electoral determination of a moot question or a piece of sharp political trickery?” Regardless of the answers, they argued:

The question is justified by the action of pressing for a vote while thousands of young men are absent in their country’s service, cannot participate in the campaign at all and can express their will be ballot, if at all, only under extremely difficult circumstances. […] Whether this question was initiated thoughtlessly or in the spirit of trickery the decent thing for the conscientious citizen now to do is to defer its settlement until the boys come home by voting no.”

While the media had already been reporting these concerns, it was not done in such an assertive way until mid-October. This type of coverage was arguably linked to the concerns raised by servicemen, particularly by the 134th Infantry in early October.

These concerns also became a major part of the Committee’s marketing strategy throughout the last few months of the election. One month after the members of Company L had their letter published in the *Omaha World-Herald*, the Committee of Men and Women Against Prohibition ran an advertisement featuring an enlarged version of it, adopting the servicemen’s voices as part of their platform. Differing from the original article, the advertisement listed all fifty-four of the names and hometowns of the men who had signed it. Similarly, they published full-page advertisements within two days of the initial reports on the petition from the 134th Infantry. They included a summary of the petition, its original inscription alongside the

---

signatures, and an excerpt from Miltonberger’s letter. In bold letters in the top corner, they proclaimed, “Under Deadly German Fire They Ask You to VOTE NO ON PROHIBITION NOVEMBER 7TH.”213 The inclusion of names and signatures could have potentially helped establish a more personal connection between readers and the anti-prohibition effort, especially if they recognized some of the men included on the petitions. Both were printed in several local newspapers, including the Beatrice Daily Sun and the Omaha World-Herald.214

The lack of support from servicemen was also emphasized in literature published outside of local newspapers as well. In a twenty-three-page pamphlet mailed to Nebraska residents, it was referenced on five pages. Snippets from published letters on the subject were included on a two-page spread, including those by Lieutenant Seiler, Sergeant Daly, and Captain Dober.215 The large-print summary to the side of the snippets recalled how servicemen found out about the initiative through the Stars and Stripes article and began writing home about it. It stated, “[Letters] came gradually at first, then faster, then in a deluge. And always they carried one plea: ‘We’re fighting for Freedom. Don’t take OUR personal freedom from us while we’re away fighting.’”216 As Morone had suggested in Hellfire Nation, prohibitionists were attempting to take away every Nebraskan’s access to liquor, effectively “strip[ping] moral inferiors” of their rights.217 However, those in opposition of the initiative “cried out that good people face[d] injustice.”218 In these excerpts, the language being used emphasized the injustices that

213 Stylistically, this is copied exactly from the advertisement. To view the copy of the advertisement published in the Omaha World-Herald, see: “A Petition from Nebraska’s Own 134th Infantry in France,” Omaha World-Herald (Omaha, NE), Oct. 1, 1944. Accessed via the Omaha World-Herald Archives, http://www.omaha.com/archive/. To view the copy of the advertisement in the Beatrice Daily Sun, see: “A Petition from Nebraska’s Own 134th Infantry in France.”
214 To view a copy of the advertisement that was printed in the Omaha World-Herald, please see Appendix B.
217 Morone, Hellfire Nation, 4.
218 Morone, Hellfire Nation, 4.
servicemen were facing; they were overseas fighting to protect people’s rights while their own were at risk of being taken away. It was strongly implied that readers do their patriotic duty and vote against the initiative in order to support those overseas and right the wrongs being done to them by prohibitionists and the Allied Dry Forces.

Near the end of the pamphlet, voting against the initiative was referenced when discussing the importance of voting on election day. The page read:

According to statistics, not over 60 per cent [sic] of the qualified voters ever vote at an election, usually even less. Of this 60 per cent [sic] or less, many more do not vote on amendments (such as the Prohibition amendment on November 7th) because it takes a little time and trouble.

The advocates of Prohibition KNOW this. They know that THIRTY PER CENT [sic] OF THE TOTAL VOTERS can go to the polls, vote solidly behind their Prohibition amendment, and attain the number of votes needed to make it law. The Anti-Saloon League (Allied Drys) are organized in Nebraska, and are out to do this very thing.

THAT’S why YOUR vote is IMPORTANT if Prohibition is to be DEFEATED. You owe it to your dear ones fighting abroad to vote November 7 on the Prohibition issue. Your vote is absolutely necessary to prevent a minority from forcing Prohibition on the majority here in Nebraska.219

They immediately connect the significance of their vote with supporting their loved ones serving overseas. Passion for political issues is often inspired by a personal connection to it and this page, as well as the others, helped establish that for readers. The sentiment behind it was similar to that expressed concerning war bonds and other methods of supporting American troops.

This argument was illustrated by a cartoon on the same page, which featured a couple discussing the election. Sitting beside each other in a set of armchairs, the husband was reading a newspaper with the word “election” emblazoned on the front. In the background, a banner adorned with two stars hung in the window. As the pamphlet was not printed in color, it is unclear if they are blue or gold, denoting two servicemen who were active in the service or killed.

219 “The Case Against Prohibition,” 19. All capitalization and italicization are as printed in the original pamphlet.
in action. Either way, an instant connection is developed between the couple and the military. The husband’s speech bubble read, “Let’s be sure to vote tomorrow,” to which the wife answered, “Yes, I think it’s unfair to propose prohibition while the boys are away.” That connection was furthered by this exchange and the way that it is represented made it appear like it could be any ordinary family in Nebraska.

This method seemed to work, at least on some level. An article in the *New York Times* on the subject included the perspective of a former WTCU member, who argued, “[The] return of prohibition would be unfair to thousands of service men.” This mindset translated to other pieces as well. In an editorial on a completely different topic, the author stated, “The continued attempt to railroad this proposal through Council in the absence of most of the men leaders on campus appears somewhat like the indefatigable Dry movement to vote [on] prohibition while the men of the country are away in the armed forces.” By the middle of October, the treatment of the issue in regards to Nebraskan servicemen had already been established, at least in some people’s minds, as synonymous with unfair.

**Opposing Views**

Not everyone was convinced by this argument though. Letters featuring opposing views on the issue were published intermittently as well, several of them arguing against the concerns raised by those in the military. The majority of these respondents were from the general public and disagreed with several aspects of the letters that were published in the local newspapers.

Several residents interpreted the references to the establishment of prohibition during World War I as the passage of the statewide initiative that was passed in 1916 instead of the

---

220 “The Case Against Prohibition,” 19.
Eighteenth Amendment in 1918. Betty Chipman asked, “Why such a fuss about this prohibition issue? Our voting on this issue was done in 1916 the first time. Our boys went across in 1917.”\^223 This was reinforced by Stephen E. Brown, who argued, “Nebraskans who voted for statewide prohibition in 1916, months before any Nebraskan was drafted for military duty, need not apologize to anyone for their action.”\^224

Some argued that passing the initiative, despite the fact that servicemen were overseas, would still only benefit them in the end. Mrs. Orville Howe cited moral and religious reasons for this in her letter. She wrote:

> In our church we are urged to create a better post-war world to which our service men can return. They are fighting to maintain a high standard of living – physically, morally, and spiritually. By keeping this in mind it is easy to understand that in order to maintain high standards we have to do everything possible to avoid lowering them. If we use our integrity to adopt and obey the prohibition law as we do other laws made for our good, we should be able to attain our goal.\^225

In her opinion, passing the initiative would ensure a better world for the servicemen. They would not return to the state they had left, but to a new and improved Nebraska instead. Just as it was the patriotic duty of those overseas to keep fighting for freedom, she believed it was the patriotic duty of residents to vote yes on the initiative.

Others approached the subject in a different way. Although most of the letters from servicemen had negative opinions on the initiative, some residents set out to dissuade readers from believing that all servicemen would be against prohibition, were they guaranteed a vote in the election. Mrs. Joe Armstrong provided an account from her son, who was serving in the navy. He recalled, “Boy this ship is really a mess. I never did see so many drunks in my life. I

\^223 Chipman, “As the Public Pulse Beats: News Reel.”
will be glad when this war is over and I don’t have to associate with such people.”

The language used amplified the unpleasant experiences of her son and his distaste for the situation was clear. Armstrong concluded, “So you can see, all the service men don’t enjoy booze.”

Several others echoed this sentiment. Referring to the so-called “scheme to again slip one over on the boys in the army,” Nebraskan J.L. Grantham argued, “There are many thousand [sic] in the armed forces who would vote for state wide prohibition.”

Corporal John J. Weber of the U.S. Army and former president of the Christian Endeavor Union took it one step further. He wrote, “[I] wish all concerned to know that there are plenty of decent men in the army who will never miss the absence of ‘taverns,’ saloons, beer joints (or by whatever name they are known) if the proposed bill receives enough favorable votes.”

His phrasing implied that the only decent servicemen were those who did not drink.

Corporal Weber was not the only resident to do this. An anonymous writer, going by the name ‘Dry,’ argued, “When congress [sic] repealed the Eighteenth amendment it gave soldiers the right to drink. Now when these many ‘drinking boys’ come back, our streets will be thronged with giddy girls, shameless women and men all in for drink, and dangers will increase.”

Corporal Weber’s implications were aggressively expounded upon in this statement. Rather than suggesting that servicemen who consumed liquor were not decent, ‘Dry’ categorized them as a risk to otherwise upstanding communities.

---


227 Armstrong, “As the Public Pulse Beats.”


Both of these letters incited responses from other Nebraskans. In response to Corporal Weber, Ed Dolan took issue with his implications that servicemen who drink were not decent. He argued, “[This] is nothing more or less than narrow-minded thinking. The character and respectability of anyone cannot be judged by whether they drink or do not drink.”231 Harold Ray’s reaction was different, in that he used ‘Dry’s’ classification of servicemen to classify prohibitionists:

‘Dry’s’ article in July 4 issue calls our ‘fighting men’ our ‘drinking men.’ That’s an insult. ‘Dry’ wants a prohibition law passed before our ‘drinking men’ get back. At last we have flushed one of these drys out in the open. Now you can see what they are up to. Pass a prohibition law while our men are away fighting for their lives and ours too. Our ‘drinking men’ indeed. The cads. […] These ‘drys’ will stoop to anything, it seems, but when they start insulting our men in service I think they are going too damn far.”232

It seemed that Ray already believed that prohibitionists were willing to go to any lengths to pass the initiative.

Several residents in the community believed that the focus on the servicemen was distracting from the actual issue. Although they were both against the initiative, Al Wiba and Will M. Maupin believed “too much stress [was being] placed on the unfairness of voting on prohibition while the boys are away fighting.”233 Instead, they pointed toward evidence of past attempts to ban liquor trafficking. Wiba asserted, “Why not let our memories serve us in recalling the dire days of nationwide prohibition, the days of speakeasies – bootleggers – poisoned whiskey – and teen-age drinking in cars, dances, and everywhere. The drys seem to think this will not happen again. They are kidding themselves.”234 Maupin insisted, “The real

234 Wiba, “As the Public Pulse Beats.”
and only question is, do we want to go back to the days of prohibition with its gangster control, poison liquor, home brewing and venal officials, or do we want to continue strict regulation with gradually increasing restrictions on the liquor traffic?"\textsuperscript{235} Both wanted to reframe the issue through the perspective of what had happened in Nebraska during the Prohibition Era. They thought that would be enough of a reason to vote no on the initiative and that the focus on the servicemen and their concerns was sidetracking that.

The heated remarks from both sides kept the issue in the local newspapers quite often. Articles on the prohibition initiative issue were printed on the same page as casualty reports and updates on the situation in Europe. The fact that both appeared within the first few pages indicated the priorities of those within the community. Eventually, Wilson “contended the Nebraska soldier vote law enabled service men to ‘ballot more easily than we can,’”\textsuperscript{236} yet a journalist argued, “The undeniable truth is that the absent soldier is at a tremendous disadvantage, however liberal the state’s absentee voter law may be.”\textsuperscript{237} This was proven true in a letter sent by Private First Class George D. Kaiser shortly before the election. In it, he wrote, “I just received word of the voting for or against prohibition. It is already too late to get a ballot, but I wish to say that I am against prohibition and there are three million others here who I can assure you feel the same way I do.”\textsuperscript{238} His experiences reinforced the concerns that other servicemen had previously shared in that he found out about the initiative late due to being on the front lines and, by that point, it was too late for him to receive a ballot and cast a vote.

\textsuperscript{235} Will M. Maupin, “Temperance Preferred.”
\textsuperscript{236} “Prohibition’s Chance Good, Drys Believe.”
\textsuperscript{237} “A Matter of Ethics.”
In the end, the comments of servicemen had drawn quite a bit of attention from parties on both sides. In recollecting recent events, an editor for the *Omaha World-Herald* wrote:

[The harsh words of servicemen had] pricked the hide and perhaps the conscience of a good many scrupulous citizens who honestly believe prohibition and its evils preferable to a licensed liquor trade and its evils. But they cannot justly complain, for if they had any active part in the submission of this question they have put themselves on the wrong side of another great moral question, that of whether the end justifies the means.\(^{239}\)

This question would only be asked all the more as events surrounding the issue continued to heat up in mid-October.

\(^{239}\)“A Matter of Ethics.”
CHAPTER IV.

“AN UNPATRIOTIC ATTEMPT TO DISRUPT THE FIGHTING FRONT:”

THE BOILING POINT OF THE 1944 ELECTION

Independence Day is often a time a celebration and patriotism and July 4, 1944 was no different. National and local pieces were written on the importance of freedom from tyranny and the recognition that the United States still had work to do. Some authors, such as Walter Lippmann in the *Omaha World-Herald*, called back to the U.S.’s roots, writing:

> The Fourth of July finds Americans fighting a gigantic war of liberation in Europe and in Asia. The authors of the Declaration of Independence would, we may be certain, have felt close in spirit with this undertaking. Better than many of us and sooner than most, they would have understood that a war of survival for the defense of American freedom would be a war of liberation abroad.

Focusing on the war front, Lippmann called attention to the principles set by the Founding Fathers which he felt were being reinforced by the Allies in Europe and the Pacific. Other authors focused on the importance of the home front. One wrote, “We have to finish the job of liberation. We have to buy war bonds and do the thousand and one other war tasks that are entrusted to us. And some of us are destined to see the shadow of death come over our homes before the job is completely finished.”

Both of these sentiments were based on the notion that the United States had a responsibility to continue fighting, both at home and abroad, in World War II. In order to ensure

---


that their rights continued to be upheld, they had to secure them elsewhere for others. Though it is ever-changing and “shaped and reshaped by social and political struggles” at home and abroad, the meaning of freedom for Americans has been intimately linked with their American identity. Eric Foner argues, “To a considerable degree, the self-definition of the United States as a nation-state with a special mission to bring freedom to all mankind depends on the ‘otherness’ of the outside world.” This pride in one’s country, to the point of feeling superior to others, is firmly connected to patriotism in the United States.

The U.S. military has often been considered the harbinger of freedom to other nations, as well as their own. Following the Civil War, “the Stars and Stripes and the men who carried it into battle emerged as the most important symbols of the enduring power of the nation-state.” In the years since, patriotism became linked with traits and behaviors that were associated with masculinity and the military. This can create an even deeper connection between patriotism and identity and this in turn leads to expectations of national service for young men, which can be especially difficult to escape in times of trouble. If they do try to avoid it, Joane Nagle argues that “they risk the disdain or worse of their communities and families.”

In the case of the 134th Infantry, the fact that they had been so successful in combat was a point of pride for Nebraskans. They were portrayed as heroes in media coverage, which avidly followed their movements across Europe. Their involvement in the anti-prohibition movement

244 Foner, *Who Owns History?*, 56.
247 Nagle cites an example of this specifically between pacifists and their mothers during World War II. To view this short section, see: Nagle, “Masculinity and Nationalism,” 252.
carried quite a bit of weight for this reason, as well as because of how many men had been involved in signing the petition. They were intimately tied to the Nebraskan identity, as well as national patriotism. As the situation escalated leading up to the election, these connections would only increase the amount of tension experienced between the different factions of the prohibition movement.

*The Boiling Point*

As the political struggle between prohibitionists and anti-prohibitionists raged back and forth, this issue of patriotism was one that increased the level of bitterness between those on both sides. The questions concerning the timing of the vote, which were raised by those in the military, suggested that the Allied Dry Forces were betraying those overseas. Harold D. Wilson eventually had to comment on it, “den[y]ing charges the drys launched the prohibition movement at a time when a large percentage of the male voting population would be in military service or working outside the state and thus might not vote on the issue.”248 Based on Nebraska media coverage, this topic was largely left untouched by the Allied Dry Forces until the 134th sent their petition to the Committee of Men and Women Against Prohibition.249 That changed when the Committee began running advertisements featuring it in early October, significantly aiding their efforts.

The 134th Infantry’s petition seemed to have surprised Wilson. As election day drew closer, he appeared to struggle with how he should respond to it. His first comments concerning the petition were made during an event held on October 4, as he addressed two Presbyterian audiences. After encouraging them to “challenge the fantastic assertions of the traffickers in

---

248 “Prohibition’s Chance Good, Drys Believe.”
249 As stated in the introduction, there is a lack of resources available on the campaign run by the Allied Dry Forces. The entirety of this assessment is based on media coverage on their events and press statements. They could have been addressing this issue more often than is portrayed through local newspapers.
liquor,” he made his first comments on the 134th Infantry’s petition.\(^{250}\) In a passing remark, he stated that “he was ‘writing Washington to ascertain who has authorized the hijacking of our service men [sic] sons.’”\(^{251}\) Although vague, it seemed to imply that the servicemen who had spoken out against the initiative were somehow being controlled.

These comments were furthered at a WCTU convention on October 19, about three weeks before the election, when he stated that the petition that had been “‘allegedly signed’ by members of the 134th regiment […] does not mention prohibition or anti-liquor legislation or anything regarding the initiative petition law.”\(^{252}\) While this was true, in order to comply with army regulations, Keith Neville disputed the claim that had been designed to cast doubt on the 134th’s position on the issue. He argued, “‘The men who signed the petition understood [that it had to do with prohibition] and so does everyone in Nebraska including, I suspect, Mr. Wilson.’”\(^{253}\) Neville went so far as to cite a letter that Miltonberger had sent him prior to the petition’s creation, which read, “If I ever get back to where it can be done, I intend to get a petition by Nebraska soldiers against the proposed dry amendment.”\(^{254}\)

Neville’s statement concluded by addressing other prohibitionists. He said, “I know the honest and conscientious drys of Nebraska do not join in his fantastic ‘fraud’ attack on the men of the state’s One Hundred Thirty-fourth Infantry. Maybe Mr. Wilson, in his less emotional moments, would hesitate to discredit the regiment.”\(^{255}\) Neville emphasized the regiment’s connection to the state in an attempt to gain the empathy of readers. He also strongly implied that Wilson was being underhanded and overly emotional when it came to defending the


\(^{251}\) “‘Home Chief U.S. Casualty.’”

\(^{252}\) “No Doubt That 134th Against Prohibition.”

\(^{253}\) “No Doubt That 134th Against Prohibition.”

\(^{254}\) “No Doubt That 134th Against Prohibition.”

\(^{255}\) “No Doubt That 134th Against Prohibition.”
initiative. In rebuttal, Wilson called Neville a “great disinterested patriotic guardian angel of our servicemen” and stated, “I resent an attack on my patriotism from that type of man.” However, this type of criticism against Wilson would only increase in the weeks before the election.

The petition as a whole had resulted in an increase in the tension surrounding the prohibition initiative. By the time the election took place, articles on the public discourse surrounding it were appearing in local newspapers nearly every day. A week prior to the election and, following the initial fallout from Wilson’s comments, “the proposed prohibition law was drawing more voter interest than candidates for political office.” This was represented well in the amount of media coverage it received, which only increased as the situation surrounding Wilson, Neville, and the 134th Infantry escalated.

On October 30, Wilson publicly declared at a town hall meeting that he was looking into court martialing Miltonberger. Newspapers warned that the fight was becoming more spiteful. One publication reported, “Carrying the fight into deep water as election day approaches, Wilson accused Colonel Miltonberger of revealing military information in the letter enclosed in the petition, when the army officer stated that many of the Nebraska men who would have liked to sign have been wounded or killed.”

During a church gathering, he proclaimed:

We are taking the matter up with the war department and officials in Washington, demanding immediate action with respect to this attempt to betray our fighting men. [...] This [commanding officer] has clearly laid himself open to court martial for reporting to the world the condition of his command…and in deliberately and personally circulating a political petition contrary to army regulations. He is doubly subject to punishment for having betrayed the men by getting them to sign something which he has used for a purpose entirely different from the wording of the petition.

---

256 “Dry Leader Hurls Charge of Forgery.”
Both Neville and Wilson used a similar, and common, political strategy, which was to exude patriotism through words and actions in order to win over voters. By appearing to defend the Nebraskan servicemen, Wilson sought out a way to build a bridge between the community and pro-prohibition forces through their personal connections with the military.

However, at the same time he was also attacking Miltonberger, who had served during World War I and was quickly becoming viewed as a Nebraskan hero for his service during World War II. The threat of court martial that Wilson was trying to raise against Colonel Miltonberger may have been a difficult one to defend. It was based on two components, the first being circulating the petition to begin with. The Hatch Act of 1939 regulates political activity at the federal level and affected those serving in the military during World War II. It allowed servicemen to vote and sign petitions for legislation, as long as those petitions were nonpartisan in nature. However, there is a clause which stipulates that it is unlawful for them to “use [their] official authority of influence for the purpose of interfering with an election or affecting the result thereof.”²⁵⁹ This seems to be the most viable option, had punishment been dealt out.

Wilson also accused Miltonberger of “‘wrongfully’ [giving] out military information about casualties.”²⁶⁰ Miltonberger had indeed written that “most of the Nebraska soldiers are wounded and in the hospital or killed,” but this did not necessarily mean that he had overstepped his bounds.²⁶¹ Neville pointed out that “the petition was mailed in France and came though the regular channels of censorship, together with [the] letter of transmittal from Colonel

²⁶¹ “A Petition from Nebraska’s Own 134th Infantry in France.”
Miltonberger."

The censorship regulations at the time did prohibit specific information about troops, including:

The general character and movements of United States Army, Navy, or Marine Corps units, within or without continental United States – their location, identity, exact composition, equipment, or strength; destination, routes, and schedules; assembly for embarkation, prospective embarkation, or actual embarkation; similar information regarding the troops of United Nations. Possible future military operations should not be revealed by identifying an individual known for a specialized activity.

None of this information matched exactly with what Miltonberger had written; he had not provided the names or number of casualties.

Wilson not only questioned the integrity of Miltonberger; he questioned the integrity of all of the men who signed the petition. He claimed, “We have the authority of one of the best-known handwriting experts in the city of Lincoln, Mr. Robinson, for more than 50 years connected with the First National bank, that at least three men twice signed the petition and that at least one block of names was signed by one man. Many of the signatures are printed, which is… a very convenient way of adding names.”

He directly challenged Miltonberger to “explain these discrepancies.” While Wilson had been trying to gain support through a seemingly patriotic defense of the men who signed, questioning them in this way had the potential to lose support for the dry forces. Personally connected to many of these men,
including Miltonberger, Nebraskan communities may not have felt it was an appropriate course of action.

Wilson’s newest comments were printed on the front page of the *Beatrice Daily Sun* and *Lincoln Journal* on October 30, as well as in the *Stars and Stripes* on November 1 and the Sunday Service Edition of the *Omaha World-Herald* on November 5. By the time Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson received word of it on November 1, the first response from the community had already been issued.

It came from William Ritchie, chairman of another anti-prohibition group. Ritchie, who had served with the 134th Infantry during World War I, immediately called Wilson’s level of patriotism into question. He stated, “Mr. Wilson’s slanderous charges against a distinguished soldier are an unpatriotic attempt to disrupt the fighting fronts…and will be resented by every straight-thinking American.” Ritchie implied that Wilson’s comments could upset the war effort abroad. Not only did he condemn these actions, but he also believed others should as well. Echoing a few of the letters from the previous chapter, he seemed to believe this had taken the campaign one step too far.

Ritchie was not alone in his outrage. Similarly, Harold D. Gillett, Department Commander of the VFW, released a statement as well. He claimed, “This attack was entirely uncalled for and we believe every loyal thinking citizen of this state likewise resents this attack

---

268 To view this article, see: “Prohibition Fight is Hot,” *Omaha World-Herald* (Omaha, NE), Nov. 5, 1944. Accessed via the Omaha World-Herald Archives, http://www.omaha.com/archive/.
269 “Nebraska Dry Row Spouts ‘Censor’ Angle.”
270 “Ritchie Raps Wilson Stand.”
which tends to slander those gallant soldiers whose very life and blood is so freely offered for the perpetuation of a free America.”

The executive committee of the Nebraska American Legion soon expressed their own opinion. They responded to Wilson’s comments with the following statement:

Be it resolved that the state executive committee of the American Legion, department of Nebraska, in regular session assembled, hereby expresses its resentment and condemnation of the unwarranted, unjustified, un-American and scurrilous attack of ‘Three Gun’ Harold D. Wilson on Col. Butler B. Miltonberger and the fighting men of the 134th infantry under his command. […] We assure these heroic fighting men from Nebraska that the infamous stab in the back, given them by the ‘Three Gun’ agitator, when, as he knew, they had no chance to reply, does not reflect the attitude or spirit of the people of Nebraska. […] We want the world to know…that the vicious, venomous and wholly unjustified attack of ‘Three Gun’ Harold D. Wilson, on these fighting men from Nebraska, to whom we shall forever be indebted, is deeply and genuinely resented and in no way reflects the sincere devotion which Nebraskans generally have to them and the cause for which they fight.

The American Legion and VFW were directly tied to the men of the 134th Infantry. As Ortiz claimed in Veterans’ Policies, Veterans’ Politics, as often took place, these organizations used those connections to lobby for the rights of the servicemen. Their response, published only three days before the election, was not swept under the rug. The language within it was designed to grab attention and the placement of the article helped it do just that. This statement did much more than address the media and general public. The executive committee also “sent [it] to Secretary of War Stimson, Nebraska congressmen and senators, to Colonel Miltonberger and ‘all the brave men in his command.’”

---

274 “Legion Group Flays Wilson.”
Even journalists at the local newspapers could not help themselves in showing how seemingly flabbergasted they were. Following a fairly straightforward summation of Wilson’s comments and actions, one wrote the following:

Colonel Miltonberger and his men fought through the bloody battle of St. Lo. They helped heroically to stop the Nazi counterattack at Avranches. They are acclaimed as the liberators of the great French city of Nancy. What they went through for America’s sake, no stay-at-home can begin to imagine. But in Mr. Wilson’s opinion, it seems their valiant deeds are as nothing compared with their heinous offense. They signed a petition against prohibition! It is an amazing revelation of the prohibitionist mind.”275

Quite aggressively, they suggested that Wilson’s perceptions of the 134th Infantry’s initiative was blown out of proportion. In an article originally printed in the North Platte Daily Bulletin, a newspaper published in Colonel Miltonberger’s hometown, another journalist asserted, “The charge yesterday of Harold D. Wilson against Col. Butler B. Miltonberger, a distinguished soldier on the field of battle, […] went part the climax and hit the downbeat in cheap politics.”276

In each of these statements, one similarity existed. Each of the parties issuing them compared Wilson’s level of patriotism in some way to the patriotism of those fighting overseas. They referenced the actions of Colonel Miltonberger and the 134th Infantry that had helped the war effort progress. Some connected patriotism with militarism, implying that Wilson had not and would not come close to the same level of aid or sacrifice for their country. For many in Nebraska, the regiment had become something to be proud of. They clearly thought that ridiculing the unit for the sake of politics was unwarranted. Due to Wilson’s comments and the resulting fallout, the “pre-election calm” and lack of “any last-minute fireworks” that had reportedly existed a week prior was long gone.277

275 “Mr. Wilson’s Revelation”
277 “Pre-Election Calm Rules in Nebraska.”
Election Day and Its Results

The bitter struggle over statewide prohibition culminated on November 7, 1944. Leading up to election day, voter registration records had set national records, primarily because of the presidential election that year.\textsuperscript{278} Rates in Nebraska were similar, with 37,563 Army and Navy personnel registering.\textsuperscript{279} Of those registered, 27,359, or about 73\%, actually cast a ballot.\textsuperscript{280} The \textit{Lincoln Journal} claimed, “The question of whether the state was to continue wet or go dry was probably one of the hottest issues of the campaign and accounted in a large part for the heavy vote.”\textsuperscript{281}

The prohibition amendment was voted down by a large margin, with 397,190 votes cast against the initiative and 130,947 votes cast for it.\textsuperscript{282} The \textit{Omaha World-Herald} reported the following morning that “incomplete returns showed only three of the state’s 93 counties voted dry.”\textsuperscript{283} One of the counties that the anti-prohibition movement had expected to vote for the initiative had even voted against it.\textsuperscript{284}

In the post-election coverage, the 134th Infantry was consistently linked with the initiative’s defeat. The prohibition initiative was referenced two separate times in the \textit{Stars and Stripes} and each included a reference to the unit and their petition against it.\textsuperscript{285}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{280} “Section 9: Elections,” 252.
  \item \textsuperscript{282} “Statistics on Constitutional Amendments, Initiated and Referred Measures,” compiled by the Nebraska State Government (2014), 258.
  \item \textsuperscript{283} “Nebraskans Oppose Dry Move 3 to 1,” \textit{Omaha World-Herald} (Omaha, NE), Nov. 8, 1944. Accessed via the Omaha World-Herald Archives, http://www.omaha.com/archive/.
  \item \textsuperscript{285} To view articles, see: “Nebraska Dry Vote Just One of Many Sidelight Issues,” \textit{Stars and Stripes} (London, UK), Nov. 8, 1944. Accessed via the Access Newspaper database, http://access.newspaperarchive.com; “Nebraska Votes
newspapers were more concerned with what had led to the initiative’s failure and, each time, it seemed the concerns of servicemen were at the center of it.

The *Beatrice Daily Sun* referred to the use of the 134th Infantry’s petition as “a factor in defeat of the liquor ban.” "Similarly, the *Omaha World-Herald* argued, “Two factors were considered paramount in the overwhelming defeat of the prohibition proposal. […] They were the belief that prohibition just wouldn’t work and resentment against the proposal being brought up in the absence of Nebraskans in the armed forces.” They even went so far as to claim, “Neville […] struck the heaviest blow for the wet cause by reproduction in full-page advertisements throughout the state of a battle-grimed petition signed by 312 Nebraska soldiers.” In their view, local servicemen and the patriotism that their letters and petitions inspired seemed to help guarantee a win.

At one point, Wilson would have disagreed with this sentiment. Shortly after the 134th Infantry’s petition had been published, he went on record saying, “The wets did so many crazy things that the people have been stirred up and the wets, as a result, are likely to get themselves out of the picture.” By the time he was interviewed following the election, he revealed that he had been prepared for a defeat two days prior to the election. Representing the Allied Dry Forces, he stated, “Everybody has had the opportunity to have his say. […] When we went into this campaign, we did not count victory in number of votes, but in educational effort. We have won in the last respect beyond our greatest expectation. The drays accept the verdict as true

---

286 “Dry Proposal Swept Under.”  
287 “Nebraskans Oppose Dry Move 3 to 1.”  
288 “3 Teetotalers Lead Fight Against Prohibition.”  
Americans and will continue to support the enforcement of existing liquor laws.”290 Even in his closing remarks, he tried to channel patriotic language and American ideals.

Neville did the same in his own statement concerning the results. On the initiative’s defeat, he said:

I never for one moment doubted the outcome. I have the greatest respect for the people of Nebraska. They seldom make mistakes in their mass decisions – and it is beyond the realm of possibility that they would make the same mistake twice. By their vote on the prohibition issue, they not only have served the best interests of their state, but have kept faith with the men and women in the armed forces by making sure that the Nebraska they return to when victory has been won will be the same Nebraska they took up arms to defend.291

Neville seemed to call upon his experiences, both as a Nebraskan and a former governor, to tap into a level of pride for the state. He also remarked on the people’s support of their local servicemen. He referred to a desire expressed in several letters from them, including the inscription on the 134th Infantry’s petition, which was wanting to return to the same Nebraska that they left. By voting against the initiative, he implied that the state’s residents had helped support those who were overseas protecting them.

The election, particularly in the last few weeks, had turned fairly negative. In order to compensate for this a bit, the Committee of Men and Women Against Prohibition ran one final advertisement after the election. Taking up a quarter of a newspaper page, it included three paragraphs commenting on the defeat of the initiative. The ending read, “The Committee is well aware that this election was no triumph for the so-called ‘wets.’ It was a victory for good government. Many of the most active workers against the return of Prohibition were themselves total abstainers. The result was a victory for the traditional common sense and practical

290 “Nebraskans Oppose Dry Move 3 to 1.”
291 “Nebraskans Oppose Dry Move 3 to 1.”
In the aftermath of the election, they tried to unite the community around what they saw as a victory for democracy, “a victory all Nebraskans can be proud of.”

The defeat of the prohibition initiative was not the only thing that Nebraskans could find pride in; the actions of local servicemen were consistently represented in the media throughout the remainder of 1944. On December 30, the *Omaha World-Herald* ran a piece that reviewed the best and the worst parts of the previous year. Under a section titled “Our Greatest Victory,” four paragraphs were dedicated to the feats accomplished by the military in both the European and Pacific Theaters. In the largest paragraph, the 134th Infantry made an appearance. The journalist recalled, “[1944] has given us, too, the Superman exploits of Nebraska’s One Hundred Thirty-fourth Infantry (whose members helped defeat prohibition in Nebraska by long-distance).” They were the only unit specifically named in the piece and, of course, mention of their role in defeating the prohibition initiative was not far behind. Represented as romanticized superheroes by one side and as rather misguided figures by the other, it was clear the community largely sided with the ways in which the anti-prohibitionists had portrayed them.

293 “A Victory for Good Government.”
CONCLUSION

This case study has examined the often-overlooked connection between the home front and battle front during World War II through political and communal lenses. The events surrounding the Nebraska prohibition initiative of 1944 connected citizens that were thousands of miles apart. Servicemen took part in political discourse taking place in their communities back home and citizens in Nebraska were able to publicly respond. This case study builds on themes present in the master narrative of World War II, yet examines them in a way that has often gone ignored.

As explored in previous chapters, patriotism and serving in the U.S. military have often been linked together in the public sphere. This tendency has not disappeared in contemporary American society. Rose argues, “Since September 11, 2001, there has been a resurgence of patriotism in American society and a complementary need to identify American ‘heroes.’”295 As recently as 2008, Gallup polls showed that American adults overwhelmingly perceived serving in the military to be patriotic. In fact, it ranked “second only to voting in elections.”296

Similarly, World War II has often been associated with a deep-rooted patriotism in the United States, particularly when it came to supporting the needs and actions of those who served overseas. In some ways, this thesis supports this portrayal. While patriotism may not have been the main reason behind every vote against the prohibition initiative, it is evident that Harold D. Wilson’s remarks against Colonel Butler B. Miltonberger and the 134th Infantry sparked outrage and controversy within the general public. Based on the remarks of several servicemen, it is also

---

295 Rose, Myth and the Greatest Generation, 1.
clear that the issue was inextricably tied to freedom and patriotism for them. This ideal was used as an argument against the initiative by individual servicemen, residents, and the Committee of Men and Women Against Prohibition. Even before servicemen started personally weighing in, it was front and center in the consciousness of the media. Therefore, the perception that voting against the initiative was someone’s patriotic duty to support those in the armed forces cannot go unacknowledged as a significant reason that the initiative was defeated.

However, it is particularly important to note that the wide-spread representation of World War II being a unifying factor in American society was not always true. Despite the fact that a war was taking place, politics could still become just as crooked. In this case, prohibitionists and anti-prohibitionists used their own representations of the 134th Infantry, as well as other servicemen, as a way to further their own gains. The war effort could not bridge every ideological division within society; it could not even put them all on hold until the war was over.

There are numerous intersections between threads of scholarship within this case study. Prohibition is not typically thought of beyond the Twenty-First Amendment; it is certainly not often linked with World War II. Yet the events that took place in Nebraska bring both of those subjects together, as well as morality and veterans in politics.297 All of them combine in this local episode and reveal a side to all of them that have gone largely unexplored. Although local history is often viewed negatively in the historical profession, incidents like that have the potential to inspire other avenues of research that have previously gone underdeveloped.

One of the main purposes of this project was to shed light on how much is still unknown about these topics, particularly at a local level. These case studies shed light on overarching

297 Veterans in politics has been largely overlooked, despite its importance throughout U.S. history. Ortiz points out that, “with one notable exception, the G.I. Bill of 1944, most topics relating to modern U.S. veterans [have] remained underexamined.” It has only been more recently that scholars have “begun to turn their attention to veterans’ issues more regularly and more rigorously.” To find out more on this topic, see: Ortiz, “Introduction,” 1-7.
issues of the time, as well as themes that are widely known and appreciated in the historical narrative. For example, James J. Kimble’s *Prairie Forge* describes the significance of Henry Doorly’s scrap metal campaign in Nebraska. Doorly’s initiative was what inspired the national drive, yet Kimble argues that it has often been overlooked in the meta narrative of World War II.²⁹⁸

Kimble’s in-depth study reexamined a bit of that story and placed it back in the historical conversation, just as this thesis has done for the prohibition initiative and the servicemen’s influence on the campaign. The subject matter for both is unique, but new approaches to military history have helped create these distinctive works as well. Without scholars questioning traditional methodologies and focuses, like Rose and Reardon, it would be difficult to break the mold. But as new generations enter into the profession, bringing new ideas, interests, and questions with them, the scholarship being produced has the potential to become even more diverse.

The world’s understanding of history will never be complete; too much has been lost or gone unrecorded for it to be anything but fragmented.²⁹⁹ However, history is special in that there is always the potential for more to be discovered and for interpretations to change. This case study supports the fact that exploring local history can piece together more of the stories that have managed to survive but have simply gone unnoticed. As Constance McLaughlin Green argues, “The story of how American people have lived as individuals and as communities must be told by the details.”³⁰⁰ These individual stories can help shed light on different facets of

²⁹⁸ Using the *Omaha World-Herald* to advertise and organize, Doorly held a competition where all ninety-three counties in the state tried to collect the most metal. For more on his initiative, see: James J. Kimble, *Prairie Forge: The Extraordinary Story of the Nebraska Scrap Metal Drive of World War II* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014).
³⁰⁰ Green, “The Value of Local History,” 91.
historical subjects, effectively reinforcing them in more diverse ways. As H.P.R. Finberg states, these micro-level studies have the potential to add significantly to our understanding of history at the macro level:

It is sometimes held that local history provides a useful method of approach to national history. And it is true that sometimes a train of momentous happenings is found to have been touched off in some village whose chronicler, by revealing this fact, teaches the national historian something he might not have discovered for himself. It is also true that if the histories of all our parishes were written as they should be written, the history of England would need to be revised at many points.\(^{301}\)

This is equally true in the United States; the information local histories provide can influence our perceptions of national themes. When considering military history, local histories and case studies have the powerful potential to lead to meaningful historical scholarship as approaches continue to develop and change. Their importance both to the profession and the historical narrative should not be overlooked.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources


Drodz, David J. and Jerry Deichert. “Table 15: Nebraska Place Populations: 1860 to 2000.” *Nebraska Historical Population Report* (Sept. 2007) pg. 83-90. Based on Decennial Censuses taken by the U.S. Census Bureau, compiled by the Center for Public Affairs Research at University of Nebraska at Omaha. Accessed via the Digital Commons at University of Nebraska Omaha, http://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/cparpublications/.


“The Case Against Prohibition.” Lincoln: Committee of Men and Women Against Prohibition, 1944.

Secondary Sources


APPENDIX A.

PROHIBITION VOTE COUNT COMPARISONS BY ELECTION YEAR

Based on the “Statistics on Constitutional Amendments, Initiated and Referred Measures,” as prepared by the Nebraska State Government, the tables below compare the number of votes cast on all constitutional amendments and initiated laws in Nebraska during the years that prohibition, in some form, was on the ballot state-wide. They establish a context for voting, especially in terms of what the state’s priorities seemed to be based on the issues proposed and their individual outcomes. The number of total votes counted also suggests what was most important to Nebraska residents during these specific years. In order to emphasize this, the issues are listed in order by total number of votes counted. As stated previously in this case study, the pieces of legislation concerning prohibition had the most votes in every election.

Figure 3: 1890 Vote Count Comparisons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Type of Legislation</th>
<th>Total Votes</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liquor Traffic Prohibition</td>
<td>Constitutional Amendment</td>
<td>194,020</td>
<td>Failed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liquor Traffic Licensing</td>
<td>Constitutional Amendment</td>
<td>166,546</td>
<td>Failed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supreme Court Size &amp; Term Limit</td>
<td>Constitutional Amendment</td>
<td>139,440</td>
<td>Passed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supreme Court &amp; District Attorney Salary Increases</td>
<td>Constitutional Amendment</td>
<td>130,711</td>
<td>Passed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3: This table compares the issues and number of votes counted for pieces of legislation proposed to the residents of Nebraska during the election of 1890. All of these issues were proposed by the state legislature. More people voted on the prohibition of liquor traffic. Nearly 27,500 more people voted on it than the licensing of liquor traffic, the second-most-voted-on issue of 1890. Both issues concerning the control of liquor failed.

Figure 4: 1916 Vote Count Comparisons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Type of Legislation</th>
<th>Total Votes</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liquor Traffic Prohibition</td>
<td>Constitutional Amendment</td>
<td>263,706</td>
<td>Passed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creation of Pure Food Department</td>
<td>Constitutional Amendment</td>
<td>197,208</td>
<td>Failed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4: This table compares the issues and number of votes counted for pieces of legislation proposed to the residents of Nebraska during the election of 1916. Both issues were proposed by popular initiative. Once again, the prohibition issue gained the most votes; nearly 66,500 more people voted on it than the Pure Food Department issue. This time, statewide prohibition was passed by voters. It was implemented nearly a year before it was proposed nationally in August 1917 and about three years before it was established by the Eighteenth Amendment in 1920.302

Figure 5: 1934 Vote Count Comparisons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Type of Legislation</th>
<th>Total Votes</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Repeal of Liquor Traffic Prohibition</td>
<td>Constitutional Amendment</td>
<td>546,181</td>
<td>Passed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creation of Unicameral Legislature</td>
<td>Constitutional Amendment</td>
<td>479,238</td>
<td>Passed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authorization of Pari-Mutuel Betting</td>
<td>Constitutional Amendment</td>
<td>438,566</td>
<td>Passed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5: This table compares the issues and number of votes counted for pieces of legislation proposed to the residents of Nebraska during the election of 1934. The repeal of liquor traffic prohibition was the only issue on the ballot that was proposed by the state legislature; the other two were proposed by popular initiative. The total number of votes cast in 1934 rose significantly, prompted by [a rise in population?]. The residents of Nebraska voted to repeal statewide prohibition, casting over 66,900 more ballots on this issue than on the creation of the unicameral legislature.

Figure 6: 1944 Vote Count Comparisons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Type of Legislation</th>
<th>Total Votes</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liquor Traffic Prohibition</td>
<td>Initiated Law</td>
<td>528,137</td>
<td>Failed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gas Tax, Prohibition of Diversion</td>
<td>Constitutional Amendment</td>
<td>477,163</td>
<td>Failed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6: This table compares the issues and number of votes counted for pieces of legislation proposed to the residents of Nebraska during the election of 1944. Both issues were proposed by popular initiative. Nearly ten years after it was repealed, the residents of Nebraska refused to re-establish state-wide prohibition. Over 50,900 more people voted on this issue than the gas tax that was proposed. This appears to be the last time prohibition was on the ballot state-wide.
The image included on the following page is of an advertisement run in the *Omaha World-Herald* by the Committee of Men and Women Against Prohibition on October 1, 1944. It features a summary of the document by the newspaper, the full text of the petition, and an excerpt from Colonel Butler B. Miltonberger’s accompanying letter alongside all 312 signatures from men serving in the 134th Infantry Regiment. This document is immensely important to this case study. It was the first document that I found concerning the prohibition initiative and, by extension, what led to its creation. It was also the petition that led to an increase in bitter discourse between residents and political leaders in Nebraska during the election of 1944, which is what this case study hinges on.

Strangely, the advertisements run in the *Omaha-World Herald* and the *Beatrice Daily Sun* are the only two published copies of the petition that I have been able to find. That does not mean it does not exist in another form, but in the time allotted for writing this thesis they were the only versions that I could access. That makes this copy of the document even more significant.
A Petition From Nebraska's Own
134th INFANTRY in France

Under Deadly German Fire
They Ask You to
VOTE NO
ON PROHIBITION
NOVEMBER 7th

This is an historic and touching document. It is a petition written and signed by 312 Nebraska men of the famed 134th Infantry—Nebraska's own regiment on the battlefields of France. It was signed shortly after this regiment made its heroic and bloody breakthrough at St. Mihiel, for which the unit was especially commended by the President. The petition—soiled and grimed by battle—was sent to former Governor Keith Neville of North Platte by Col. Butler D. Milhollen, commander of the regiment. It pleads for a defeat of the proposed state prohibition law in November. Following is an excerpt from Col. Milhollen's letter accompanying the petition:

"I am sorry," Col. Milhollen said, "there are no more names on the petition. Two things appear to make them hard to get. The first is that most of the Nebraska soldiers are wounded and in the hospital or killed, and second, we are busy at the big showing service we have been interested in hearing the comments of the soldiers when signing it. They were in a mad and desperate mood. They feel as soon as they look at this that their first impulse is to say, 'To hell with it!' Many of these signatures are of men who never drink, but they feel the same. I hope you get all the petitions in effective use."

The PETITION

To the People of Nebraska:

We, the undersigned citizens of Nebraska, who are now serving in the armed forces in defense of our country, are disheartened to learn that those of us who serve this war may have to return to the kind of Nebraska that our fathers returned to in 1919. We feel that we are being dishonored. Our minds are fully occupied with two propositions: To kill as many Germans as possible, and that we may get home as quickly as possible, and to ourselves survive until we can get homes again. We ask the people of Nebraska to see to it that the Nebraska we return to will be the same Nebraska we left when we entered the Armed Forces.

REPRODUCED HERE IN EXACT FACSIMILE BY THE COMMITTEE OF MEN AND WOMEN AGAINST PROHIBITION

Keith Neville, North Platte, Chairman
John B. Queen, Lincoln, Manager