



## Newsletter Issue 48, July 2020

### The YMCA in WWI



The YMCA's troop support mission predates the Civil War, but certainly saw its heyday during WWI. With a paid staff of 26,000 and aided by 35,000 volunteers, they performed 90% of all troop welfare work for the AEF in Europe. The YMCA operated 26 R&R leave centers in France, manned 4000 huts and tents for recreation and religious services, staffed 8000 troop trains to provide refreshments and hostess services, mobilized 1470 entertainers overseas to perform for the troops, ran 1500 canteens and exchanges, and even awarded 80,000 educational scholarships to veterans after the war—a precursor of the GI bill. Today almost all of these things are institutionalized in the services themselves, but 100 years ago it was the YMCA which provided innovative and much needed morale and welfare services. The YMCA took 28 casualties in the Great War, including six men and two women killed in action. 319 citations and decorations were awarded YMCA staff and volunteers, including the French Legion d'Honneur, the Order of the British Empire, the Distinguished Service Cross and the Distinguished Service Medal. Today, a bronze plaque marks the location of YMCA WWI centers in the French towns of Bar-le-Duc, Cauterets, Chateau Thierry, Fort Douaumont, and Gondrefort (pictured here).

### Olympic Bravery



William Fiske won his first Olympic Gold Medal at 16 years of age in 1928 in St Moritz as the driver of the American then 5-man bobsled team. Four years later in 1932 at Lake Placid, he carried the US flag in the opening ceremony before again piloting team USA to the gold in the now 4-man bobsled event. He was born in Chicago in 1911, but attended school in France in 1924 where he discovered bobsledding and the glorious European ski areas of the alps. He declined to compete in the 1936 games in Garmisch Partenkirchen, likely because of his opposition to the politics in Germany at the time. In 1936 he bought an option on an abandoned property in the faded mining town of Aspen, Colorado. He and a partner built a ski lodge which opened in 1937, hired guides, and put in the first ski lift, Boat Tow, to give birth to the now famous Aspen ski area. With war looming in Europe, Fiske traveled to England and, pretending to be Canadian, enlisted in the Royal Air Force. He was one of nine US aircrew personnel to take part in the Battle of Britain. On 16 August 1940, he was sent to intercept a squadron of German dive-bombers in his Hurricane. He took a hit in his fuel tank, but despite his badly burned ankles managed to nurse his damaged plane back to the airfield. He died after surgery on 17 August at 29 years old, one of the very first American aviators killed in the war. He is buried in Boxgrove in the UK. He has a memorial stained glass window in the Boxgrove Priory church. There is also a plaque dedicated to him in the St Paul's cathedral in London. In addition, he is listed on the Battle of Britain monument in London and the Battle of Britain memorial in Capel-le-Ferne (by Folkstone). The USA Bobsled Federation continues to award the Billy Fiske Memorial Trophy to the national champion 4-man bobsled team each year.



*Remember, because of the CARES Act, donations up to \$300 (\$600 for joint filers) are tax deductible, even if the tax filer cannot itemize and therefore takes the standard deduction. Please consider us in your charitable giving this year.*