

## REMEMBERING THE GREAT WAR

by Jerry L. Wallace

*Over there, over there. Send the word, send the word over there, that the Yanks are coming, the Yanks are coming, the drums rum-tumming everywhere,*

*So prepare, say a pray'r. Send the word, send the word to beware, We'll be over, we're coming over, and we won't come back till it's over over there.*

—George M. Cohan's "Over There," 1917

This coming April will mark the Centenary of America's entry into the Great War, as it was called back then. Some of our anniversaries are more significant than others. This Great War anniversary is most certainly one that warrants public recognition and solemn commemoration. The war was a great engine of destruction and change and was perhaps the greatest historical event shaping the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Some of its consequences, such as the breakup of the Ottoman Empire, still haunt us today in the Middle East.

The Great War had begun on August 1, 1914. This was some two years and eight months prior to America's entry into the war. What set off the conflict was the assassination of the Archduke Francis Ferdinand, heir to the imperial throne of Austria-Hungary, and the dismal failure of diplomacy to resolve successfully the ensuing crisis. Europe divided into two warring camps: the Triple Entente, consisting of Great Britain, France, Russia, and later Italy; and the Central Powers, made up Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and the Ottoman Empire.

Americans, enjoying a pleasant summer and focused on events at home, were shocked by this horrible event, which seemed to come out of nowhere. One hundred years of relative European peace under the *Pax Britannia* had ended. Pope Benedict XV, sensing the significance of the Great War, labeled it "the suicide of Europe."

President Woodrow Wilson immediately proclaimed that America would remain neutral in thought and in action. This was an important consideration given the large number of our citizens—especially those with English and Germanic roots—having links to the various belligerent nations.

As a whole, Americans certainly agreed that the United States had no business whatsoever in this European war. It was Europe's folly, not ours. Had not George Washington himself warned Americans against getting caught up in the evil of "foreign entanglements"?

The Great War's impact was felt almost immediately here at home with a fall off in trade, which was followed by an economic slump. This bleak situation soon changed, however,