

UA CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF TOBACCO AND SOCIETY MARKS THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE END OF WORLD WAR I WITH AN EXHIBITION ON SMOKING IN THE MILITARY

The Makin's of a Nation: Tobacco & World War I, an online exhibition by the University of Alabama Center for the Study of Tobacco and Society (<https://csts.ua.edu/wwi>), chronicles the essential role of tobacco both in the battlefield trenches and on the home front. The dramatic rise in cigarette smoking among the young men who fought in World War I also planted the seeds of an epidemic of lung cancer, heart disease, and emphysema.

The exhibition, which marks the centenary of Armistice Day, includes over 30 original cigarette advertisements and other items from the collection of the Center for the Study of Tobacco and Society, as well as images of tobacco on the front lines from the collections of the Library of Congress, the National Archives, the New York Public Library, and the U.S. Army Signal Corps.



The tobacco industry seized on the war as a means to portray itself as the patriotic supplier of a source of comfort and relaxation to the heroic doughboys “over there.” One advertisement refers to cigarettes as “Munitions of Peace.”

The American Red Cross, the YMCA, and other health groups were enlisted to support tobacco funds to send cigarettes to the soldiers. Two decades later, New Orleans thoracic surgeon Alton Ochsner would raise the alarm that the increasing number of cancerous lungs he was removing were in veterans who had taken up cigarette smoking in World War I.

A highlight of the exhibition is a recording by the University of Alabama Singers of “The Makin’s of the USA,” a song composed during the war to raise money for the tobacco funds. The exhibition also features recordings by individuals in the

Department of Modern Languages and Classics of anecdotes about smoking during the war.

The exhibition was curated by Kevin Bailey, MA, the digital archivist for the Center for the Study of Tobacco and Society.

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