

2023

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### Recommended Citation

LeBlanc, Jeff (2023) "The San Bernardino Daily Sun and Local Reporting of the Great War," *History in the Making*: Vol. 16, Article 10.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/history-in-the-making/vol16/iss1/10>

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# **The San Bernardino Daily Sun and Local Reporting of the Great War**

By Jeff LeBlanc

*Abstract: The scope and ferocity of World War I (1914-1918) shocked the world. It was the first conflict that was reported to the public in near real-time, engrossing people around the world. This paper analyzes the reporting on World War I by a regional American newspaper in Southern California, from America's initial debate about entering the war in early 1917 until the end of hostilities in 1918. This paper makes use of the newspaper articles printed by the San Bernardino Daily Sun to analyze and evaluate the substantive content and underlying purpose of news stories published by the Daily Sun during the period immediately preceding and covering the First World War. This analysis will show that the Daily Sun's reporting on World War I was remarkably transparent, accurate, and contemporaneous. Further, the people of San Bernardino were well-informed and took an intense interest in the war before America was even formally involved. The San Bernardino Daily Sun published accurate information from Europe through the Associated Press as well as numerous patriotic and local interest stories about the war, regional involvement, and the economic and political ramifications of the conflict. These insights into rural American society through the lens of the San Bernardino Daily Sun's war reporting provide a window into the past and a fascinating look at the reaction to the most significant historical event of its time, World War I.*

## **Introduction**

World War I was the world's first modern, industrial war. The war caused the death of empires and heralded the death of the

European world order and the rise of the American. The war was widely reported on around the world; the advent of wireless transmission technology, radio, and cable networks linked the fighting in Europe with the broader world, allowing news organizations to transmit information globally with remarkable speed. The early twentieth century was a period of transition; although new technologies were influencing warfare and communication, for the average American, the local newspaper remained the only source of news.

Located in southern California sixty-one miles east of Los Angeles, San Bernardino County experienced explosive growth in the early twentieth century. The county population almost doubled between 1900 and 1910.<sup>1</sup> However; this still resulted in a very sparse population density of fewer than two persons per square mile.<sup>2</sup> San Bernardino was the largest geographic county in the country, although much of its land consisted of inhospitable deserts and mountains. The City of San Bernardino was founded in 1854. By the beginning of the twentieth century, it was the regional hub for the Santa Fe, Union Pacific, and Southern Pacific Railroads.<sup>3</sup> With a population of 6,150 in 1900, as a result of the California land rush and the presence of the railroad hub, the population of San Bernardino City was 14,068 by 1910 and growing fast.<sup>4</sup> Although San Bernardino had local papers from 1862 until 1886, most were published weekly versus daily; examples include *The Guardian* (1862-1864) and *The San Bernardino Weekly Times* (1876 -1886). By 1886, the population supported a daily local paper, *The Courier* (1886-1894). In 1886, *The Courier* changed its name to *The Daily Sun*. The *Sun* has been in continuous operation

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<sup>1</sup> *United States Census*, "1910 Census Abstract," accessed March 28, 2022, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1910/abstract/supplement-ca.pdf>, 578; In 1900, the county population was 27,929 people, but by 1910, the population had doubled to 56,706.

<sup>2</sup> *"United States Census,"* 568.

<sup>3</sup> City of San Bernardino Public Library, "Local History," accessed February 16, 2022, <https://www.sbcity.org/cityhall/library/services/history/default.asp>

<sup>4</sup> *"United States Census,"* 578.

since 1894.<sup>5</sup> By 1917, the *Sun* and its readers were connected to the world and reporting global news to its readers at a time when other news sources were unavailable or in distant cities. Thus, the *Sun* provided San Bernardino's people with an incomparable source of local news and access to events of national and international importance.

The *Sun*'s reporting on the war did not supplant but rather supplemented its usual publication of the news. However, the importance of the war to the *Sun*'s editors nevertheless permeated its pages. Descriptions of major battles were printed beside advertisements by local merchants and news of civic events and activities; the *Sun*'s readers could learn of a sale at the local car dealership while simultaneously reading about the American war effort or the activities of the YMCA. While civilian life continued in San Bernardino, the importance of the war to the *Sun* and its readership is clearly evident and is thus the focus of this paper.

This paper will analyze the kind and quality of information available to the *Sun*'s readers during the war, San Bernardino's local involvement in the war effort, and how the *Sun*'s news was procured. By doing so, it provides insight into the lives of San Bernardino's people and the functioning of the American press during World War I. This paper chronologically analyzes the *Sun*'s reporting during four distinct phases of World War I from 1917 to 1918. American involvement in the war: (1) the political actions and preparations to join the war; (2) America's first major campaign on the defensive against Germany's Operation *Michael*; (3) the Champagne-Marne offensive where American and French troops stopped Germany's last major strategic attack; and (4) the Meuse-Argonne offensive that ultimately ended the war. These four phases encompass in various ways the politics of the war as well as situations where American forces were engaged as aggressors and defenders, good news and bad. The intent is to

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<sup>5</sup> University of California Riverside, "California Digital Newspaper Collection San Bernardino Sun 1894-1997," accessed February 16, 2022, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=cl&cl=CL1&sp=SBS> hereinafter cited as "San Bernardino Sun: Volume, Number, Date."

review and analyze the news and how it was transmitted to the people of San Bernardino during very different phases and circumstances, victory and defeat, offense and defense. This analysis shall find that the people of San Bernardino were remarkably well informed regardless of the military or political situation. They had access to detailed and graphic news from the front within a day of events. Additionally, the *Sun* published inspirational local stories and patriotic “puff” pieces to rally San Bernardinans to the war effort while providing an accurate, detailed account of the war.

### ***American Declaration of War - March 30 through April 6, 1917***

The war began on July 28, 1914, when the Austro-Hungarian Empire declared war on Serbia. However, the United States remained neutral because it was not involved in the tangle of alliances that drew most major European powers into the war. American public and political opinion was predominantly neutralist in the early war years, with President Woodrow Wilson himself campaigning with the slogan, “He Kept Us Out of War!”<sup>6</sup> Although there was a general feeling that the war was imperialist or European, there was nevertheless growing American concern as American interests were impacted by hostilities. The sinking of the *Lusitania* in May 1915, unrestricted submarine warfare and the destruction of American merchant ships, and the sensationalism surrounding espionage, including the Zimmermann telegram, helped an increasing pro-Entente and pro-intervention American government direct public opinion towards intervention.<sup>77</sup>

Despite his 1916 anti-war campaign, Woodrow Wilson

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<sup>6</sup> Alan Axelrod, *Selling the Great War: The Making of American Propaganda*, Palgrave MacMillan (2009), preface page x.

<sup>7</sup> John Milton Cooper, Jr., *Woodrow Wilson*, 2009, Vintage, at 341–2; Doenecke, Justus D, *Nothing Less Than War: “A New History of America’s Entry Into World War I,”* Studies in Conflict, Diplomacy and Peace Series. 2011, University Press of Kentucky, at 286. Retrieved March 3, 2022.

began maneuvering the United States into direct involvement in the war throughout late 1916 and early 1917. On April 2, 1917, President Wilson asked for a special joint session of Congress to discuss and vote upon the entry of the United States into the war. Wilson addressed Congress and asked for a “war declaration, stronger navy, new army of 500,000 men, full cooperation with Germany’s foes.”<sup>8</sup> The United States Senate passed a resolution declaring war on Germany on April 4, and the House of Representatives followed on April 6.<sup>9</sup> A declaration of war against the Austro-Hungarian Empire followed on December 7, 1917, after the severing of diplomatic relations between the two powers and the ongoing conflict with Germany.<sup>10</sup>

The analysis of the *San Bernardino Daily Sun*’s coverage of the declaration of war begins with the March 30, 1917, edition. Although there are earlier articles discussing the politics and ramifications of the war, the coverage that day directly related to the eventual declaration of war on April 6th through its two front-page stories. The first was provided to the *Sun* through the Associated Press (AP) and discussed President Wilson’s preparation for his anticipated April 2nd, Congressional address advocating for a declaration of war against Germany.<sup>11</sup>

The second story bears a deeper analysis. Located in the center of the front page, this story, presumably written by a local reporter, is a locally written patriotic “puff” piece graphically ensconced in American flag pillars carried by two fierce eagles and

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<sup>8</sup> “President Calls for War Declaration, Stronger Navy, New Army of 500,000 Men, Full Cooperation With Germany’s Foes,” *The New York Times*, April 2, 2017, <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/big/0402.html>, accessed March 3, 2022.

<sup>9</sup> Jennifer K. Elsea and Matthew C. Weed, “Declarations of War and Authorizations for the Use of Military Force: Historical Background and Legal Implications,” (April 18, 2014), Retrieved March 3, 2022, 11.

<sup>10</sup> Jennifer Elsea, “Declaration of War and Authorizations,” 11.

<sup>11</sup> Robert H. Ziegler, *America’s Great War: World War I and the American Experience*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., (2000), 55; *San Bernardino Sun*; Volume 46, Number 26, March 30, 1917.

entitled, in a display of verbose irony; “San Bernardino Engages in Wonderful Demonstration of Unostentatious Patriotism.”<sup>12</sup> The “Unostentatious Patriotism” story begins with a lengthy pledge by “the citizens of San Bernardino in mass meeting assembled: That we pledge to the government of the United States in the present crisis, our united support, and, if need be, our treasures and our lives.”<sup>13</sup> The pledge continues for four more paragraphs commending the government, promising support, pledging aid to the local militia unit (Company K), and further directing that local offices and officers have “the flag of our country constantly displayed from all public buildings, schoolhouses, and flagpoles in the parks until the issue raised between our country and the German empire shall have been settled.”<sup>14</sup> This *ostentatious* display of patriotic support is indicative of the level of public fervor surrounding the country’s probable entry into the war and is further interesting because, as of the date of publication, there was no formal “issue raised” between the United States and Germany. However, it is clear from this article that, for the people of San Bernardino, the declaration of war was a foregone conclusion even before President Wilson’s request to Congress. The remainder of the article includes patriotic appeals from local leaders such as Mayor George H. Wixom and interview snippets from officers in Company K. The article also claims that some 7,500 people from San Bernardino and surrounding towns participated in a “demonstration of gigantic proportions in the form of a parade and mass meeting at Pioneer Park in San Bernardino.”<sup>15</sup> “Unostentatious Patriotism” indeed, because if true, the 7,500 people in attendance would have equaled about half of the total population of San Bernardino city itself.

The March 31, 1917, coverage included a variety of general news articles about American military preparations nationally, the status of local Company K, and further discussion about President

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<sup>12</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 46, Number 26, March 30, 1917.

<sup>13</sup> San Bernardino Sun, Volume 46, Number 26, March 30, 1917.

<sup>14</sup> San Bernardino Sun, Volume 46, Number 26, March 30, 1917.

<sup>15</sup> San Bernardino Sun, Volume 46, Number 26, March 30, 1917.

Wilson's anticipated justification for his request for a war declaration. The March 31st edition also contained two interesting front-page articles. The first discusses American captives of German commerce raiders, the *Sun's* publishing of which can reasonably be considered implicit support of President Wilson's war request.<sup>16</sup> The second article is an uncredited story about former President McKinley's Secretary of the Treasury, Lyman J. Gage, proposing protection for American shipping but stating that "I hold at the present time it is neither wise nor necessary immediately to declare war against Germany."<sup>17</sup> The vast majority of the *Sun's* stories were pro-war, likely in preparation for the perceived inevitability of the declaration of war and implicitly supportive of Wilson's upcoming congressional speech. The cover page of the March 31st edition contains five articles either in support of the war or providing information on American preparation; the anti-war article quoting Mr. Gage is the sole exception.<sup>18</sup> It would seem that Mr. Gage was a pacifist and, thus, a proponent of America's continued armed neutrality.<sup>19</sup> The *Sun's* April 1, 1917, coverage contains no stories about either the war or Wilson's impending speech to Congress. The *Sun* did not publish on Monday, and thus there was no printed edition for April 2, 1917. The April 3rd edition is almost entirely devoted to Wilson's speech; local military preparations involving San Bernardino's Company K, and further allegedly provocative

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<sup>16</sup> San Bernardino Sun, Volume 46, Number 26, March 30, 1917.

<sup>17</sup> San Bernardino Sun, Volume 46, Number 26, March 30, 1917.

<sup>18</sup> San Bernardino Sun, Volume 46, Number 26, March 30, 1917.

<sup>19</sup> It would appear that Mr. Gage, who had been known for his conservative administration of the First National Bank of Chicago and the United States Trust Company and a staunch conservative proponent of the gold standard, became a staunch pacifist in his later years. In 1906, the Washington Times Magazine reported that Mr. Gage had joined a Theosophist cult in Southern California run by Kathrine Tingley, who "rules over an almost terrestrial paradise with Czar-like authority." Washington Times Magazine, July 15, 1906, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84026749/1906-07-15/ed-1/seq-48/> (accessed April 26, 2022)



actions by Germany.<sup>20</sup> On April 3, 1917, the *Sun* proudly reported that Company K left to join the eleventh Regiment at Arcadia, with its Commanding Officer Leo A. Stromee quoted as encouraging that “[a]ny time the residents of the city may visit they will be welcomed in our camp. The parents, especially the mothers are invited to see their sons in army life...”<sup>21</sup> The entire front page of the *Sun* on April 3rd is devoted to war reporting, with the exception of three short partial stories including the installation of the first female congresswoman, Jeanette Rankin of Montana.<sup>22</sup> One of these stories was an Associated Press story about the sinking of the United States’ first armed merchant vessel, the *SS Aztec*, by a German submarine off the coast of France on April 2, 1917.<sup>23</sup> The timing of the *Aztec*’s sinking is interesting from a couple of perspectives; first, even while the United States President was about to ask Congress to declare war on Germany, the Germans were freely targeting U.S. shipping; and second, as an armed merchantman, the *Aztec* was exactly the type of defensive response advocated by Mr. Gage on March 31st. Its sinking a few days later serves as a poignant counterpoint to his pacifist position of armed neutrality.

The *Sun*’s April 4th and 5th editions report extensively on the debates in Congress and the state of American preparedness for war. The April 4th headline reads “Rush War Plan as Congress Delays Action,” while the front page contains stories provided by the Associated Press about the recruitment of a San Bernardino contingent for former president Theodore Roosevelt’s military division, a description of the violent German bombardment of Rheims, and the graduation of 183 midshipmen from the naval academy at Annapolis.<sup>24</sup> On April 5th, the *Sun* continued covering the ongoing congressional debate as well as additional news reporting on the war and American preparedness under the

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<sup>20</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 46, Number 28, April 3, 1917.

<sup>21</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 46, Number 28, April 3, 1917.

<sup>22</sup> San Bernardino Sun, Volume 46, Number 26, March 30, 1917.

<sup>23</sup> San Bernardino Sun, Volume 46, Number 26, March 30, 1917.

<sup>24</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 46, Number 29, April 4, 1917.

headlines “Senate Passes War Resolution” and “Break with Austria Now Seems Certain.”<sup>25</sup>

With war imminent, one story in the April 4, 1917 edition of the *Sun* stands out; this is a local story about a labor strike among Mexican lemon and orange pickers throughout San Bernardino County— “[w]ith nearly 1,000 Mexicans, it is estimated, on a strike in San Bernardino county, probe of the source of agitation was actively started underway by a detective agency” and the investigation was focused on the affiliation of “at least one well-dressed Mexican” believed to be from Los Angeles.<sup>26</sup> Easily dismissed as a story of war paranoia and ethnic fear-mongering, the clear implication that labor in the important local citrus industry was being agitated by an outside source manifested many people’s genuine fears surrounding the war. The *Sun* used this local story to drive up fear and concern about America’s internal security. San Bernardino readers would likely be considering the coincidence of Mexican agitation only a few months after the German Foreign Secretary, Alfred Zimmermann, was caught clumsily seeking to enlist the help of Mexico in a war against the United States in January 1917.<sup>27</sup> On April 6, 1917, the United States declared war on Germany. Unsurprisingly, the passing of the war resolution by the House of Representatives (the Senate had passed it on April 4th) was the top story because the United States was then at war with the German Empire.<sup>28</sup> However, in addition to the usual stories about American war preparations, a couple of interesting stories are reported in the *Sun*.

The first is an associated press story entitled “U.S. Will Not Sever Relations With Either Austria or Turkey,” discussing the continued neutrality between the three powers despite their respective active belligerence against allies on each side.<sup>29</sup> The second story was locally written and addressed the April 4th

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<sup>25</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 46, Number 30, April 5, 1917.

<sup>26</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 46, Number 30, April 5, 1917.

<sup>27</sup> Ziegler, *America’s Great War: World War I*, 59

<sup>28</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 46, Number 31, April 6, 1917.

<sup>29</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 46, Number 31, April 6, 1917.

Mexican labor strike story with a rising sense of Germanophobia, entitled “Wireless Plant of a German Family is Closed: Probe of Secret Service Men Here Extends to Needles; Strike, too.”<sup>30</sup> This second story seeks to directly tie the Mexican labor strike with phantom German spies allegedly trafficking information in the isolated desert town of Needles, California. The alleged evidence of suspicious activity levied against the family operating a wireless plant in the hills above Needles consisted of nothing more than their German ethnicity and the fact that their son left school and that he was “now known for the first time to be an expert wireless operator.”<sup>31</sup> This fascinating, rambling story continues by describing the discharge of two Germans from subsidiary companies of the Santa Fe railway, one of whom was alleged to have held a meeting with two “peddlers” who once inquired after him in San Bernardino’s alleged center of German activity, Needles. The story continues without any logical link between suspected German malfeasance and the ongoing Mexican strike by using baseless innuendo to link Germany with the labor strike feebly; “[t]he Mexican strike, started by agitators the identity of whom is anxiously sought by officers, continues to spread” and “[m]any Mexicans with tears in their eyes told officials they wanted to continue work, but had been threatened with death if they did.”<sup>32</sup> This local story appears to be nothing more than ethnically driven fear-mongering.

However, the reporter perhaps unintentionally reveals a legitimate motivation behind the labor strike when discussing the refusal of multiple white men to perform the Mexican’s menial labor: “Yesterday, the number of white men who had quit their places because of the request to do the work the Mexicans had been doing increased to twenty-five.”<sup>33</sup> There is no evidence that Germans were involved in the strike whatsoever.

The stories published by the *Sun* in the week preceding the

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<sup>30</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 46, Number 31, April 6, 1917.

<sup>31</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 46, Number 31, April 6, 1917.

<sup>32</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 46, Number 31, April 6, 1917.

<sup>33</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 46, Number 31, April 6, 1917.

declaration of war were a predictable combination of local and national military preparation stories, status updates on the request and procedure for declaring war, and articles demonstrating German aggression and brutality and thus implicitly supporting an eventual declaration of war *to protect American interests*. However, there are a couple of aberrant stories, including the March 31, 1917, anti-war article by former treasury secretary Gage and the rather shallow attempts to relate Mexican labor issues with German infiltration. Nevertheless, the news reported by the *Sun*, especially factual stories about the conduct of the war, are notably detailed and timely; often appearing on the pages of the *Sun* within a day of the events in Europe or Washington, a delay which is in line with a newspaper's daily publication cycle. The *Sun*'s progress, preparation, and propaganda stories, however, are often guilty of hyperbole and are clearly intended to both report the federal government's activities but also implicitly to support those activities through favorable and sometimes sensational publication. Regardless, it is clear that in the debate leading up to the April 6th declaration of war, the *Sun*'s readers were well informed, and local interest stories on preparedness, the strike, and dastardly Germans imply that they were also very involved and interested in the ramifications of the debate.

### ***Operation Michael, 21 March – 6 April 1918***

On December 15, 1917, the Central Powers and Russia signed an armistice and initiated peace negotiations. The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was signed between the Central Powers and Russia on March 3, 1918, removing Russia from the war and freeing significant German resources for transfer to the Western Front.<sup>34</sup> The German general staff recognized that they had a brief

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<sup>34</sup> James Edward Edmonds, "Military Operations France and Belgium, 1918: The German March Offensive and its Preliminaries," *History of the Great War Based on Official Documents, by Direction of the Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defence. Vol. I*, 1935, Imperial War Museum & Battery Press: London, 140.

opportunity to exploit an advantage in manpower and materiel before American military forces arrived in overwhelming numbers in the West.<sup>35</sup> As a consequence, they planned a series of offensives to try to win the war in the West while they had that advantage. The Germans planned four offensives against *Entente* positions in the West, codenamed *Michael*, *Georgette*, *Gneisenau*, and *Blucher-Yorck*. These became known as the German spring offensives.

Beginning on March 21, 1918, the Germans launched their main attack, "Operation *Michael*," from the Hindenburg line between the towns of Arras, St. Quentin, and La Fere in France.<sup>36</sup> *Michael* intended to use local German superiority, thanks to reinforcements from Russia, to overwhelm the *Entente* defensive positions, drive the British Expeditionary Force into the sea, take control of channel ports, and drive a wedge between the British and French armies. The German attack was focused on an area of the front only recently occupied by the British Expeditionary Force following the German retreat to the Hindenburg line in February-April, 1917.<sup>37</sup> The German Chief of Staff, Erich Ludendorff, assembled a formidable force of 74 divisions, 6,600 artillery pieces, 3,500 mortars, and 326 fighter aircraft to attack along a sixty-nine-kilometer section of the front.<sup>38</sup> Facing the initial German attack was the heavily outnumbered British Third and Fifth Armies, which were eventually augmented by large numbers of French, British, and (for the first time on the Western Front) Americans.

Early on March 21, 1918, a massive German artillery barrage saturated sixty kilometers of the British front line, causing

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<sup>35</sup> Edmonds, "Military Operations France and Belgium," 139.

<sup>36</sup> C. Falls, "Military Operations France and Belgium 1917: The German Retreat to the Hindenburg Line and the Battles of Arras," *History of the Great War Based on Official Documents*, by Direction of the Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defence. Vol. I 1940, Imperial War Museum & Battery Press, London, 110-116.

<sup>37</sup> Falls, "Military Operations France and Belgium," 110-116.

<sup>38</sup> Martin Kitchen, *The German Offensives of 1918*, (Stroud: Tempus, 2001), 288.

chaos, damaging defensive capabilities, and disrupting communications. When German infantry followed up the artillery barrage with a general attack, they advanced through the British lines, despite often stubborn resistance. By March 24th, the British had been pushed back to the Somme River, and both British and French reinforcements were struggling to contain an extremely dangerous German attack that threatened the strategic balance in the West.<sup>39</sup> However, after three days of relentless combat, the German breakthrough bogged down. Nevertheless, the Germans continued to advance against stiffening British and French resistance. On March 25th, the first units of the United States Army were provided to the British to oppose the German advance.<sup>40</sup> The Germans continued to exploit *Entente's* disorganization and threatened to advance on the town of Amiens and drive a wedge between the French and British armies, which would have been a strategic disaster for the *Entente*. However, the *Entente* was able to throw fresh reinforcements in front of the German attack. The Germans lacked sufficient manpower and materiel to exploit their significant initial gains fully and were dangerously over-extended.<sup>41</sup> Despite threatening the entire *Entente* front, the German attack petered out by April 6th. The Germans took approximately 3,100 square kilometers of territory and advanced as far as sixty-five kilometers into *Entente*-held territory but failed to break the *Entente* line or seize any of *Michael's* primary objectives.

Although *Michael* began on March 21, 1918, that day's edition of the *Sun* contained no stories about the offensive, likely because news of the attacks arrived after the *Sun* went to print. On March 21st, the *Sun* contained a number of Associated Press stories about the conduct of the war, including one where American units were in action near Venice, Italy: "Mustard Gas Dropped on Americans in Trench Warfare." However, the next day, March 22nd, the *Sun* began reporting on the German advance

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<sup>39</sup> Ziegler, *America's Great War: World War I*, 96

<sup>40</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 48, Number 22, March 26, 1918.

<sup>41</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 48, Number 22

and printed stories entitled “Teuton Drive Begun” and “Gigantic Smash Under Way Over 50 Miles of Line on Scale Hitherto Unknown in Great War.”<sup>42</sup> Even on the first day of Operation *Michael*, its size and scope were remarkable and concerning. The *Sun* published three different stories on the ferocity of the German attack and Allied preparations, assuring readers that despite initial German success, the *Entente* was prepared and confident. As a result, the *Sun*’s reporting on the German offensive is accurate and detailed but also seeks to reassure readers by letting them know that the “British had been expecting the movement and had made great preparations for the drive” and that “Washington has Supreme Confidence that Allies will Defeat Drive.”<sup>43</sup>

As the scope and severity of the German offensive became increasingly apparent, its coverage by the *Sun* increased. The March 23, 1918, edition was dominated by news of the war, in particular Operation *Michael*, the severity of which was broadcast to readers with two distinct front-page stories describing the events of the previous day under the overarching, all-capitalized headline “FRIGHTFUL LOSSES BY BOTH ARMIES IN TITANIC STRUGGLE.”<sup>44</sup> The *Sun*’s March 23rd stories were remarkably open about the fighting’s brutality and the uncertainty of success, noting that the “Ground is literally covered with dead” and that the German foreign office claimed to have captured “16,000 men and over 200 guns” in the fighting.<sup>45</sup> There does not appear to be any attempt to minimize the seriousness, danger, or brutality of the attack in the *Sun*, thus providing readers with a brutally accurate account of a very dangerous time for the *Entente* position.

The *Sun* balances the stark, brutal reality of the ongoing battle with a combination of hopefully patriotic reports and stories that appear designed to boost morale. For example, there is a story about a U.S. Navy gunboat capturing an armed German schooner,

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<sup>42</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 48, Number 19, March 22, 1918.

<sup>43</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 48, Number 19, March 22, 1918.

<sup>44</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 48, Number 20, March 23, 1918.

<sup>45</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 48, Number 20, March 23, 1918.

the *Alexander Agassiz*, off the western coast of Mexico.<sup>46</sup> The story of the arming and the subsequent capture of the *Agassiz* served as a story of success but also of caution and warning to the readership; that danger was close to home and suggested that Mexican interests were tied to those of Imperial Germany. Further stories detailed how local women organized sales booths to aid a local ThriftStamp campaign to raise money; how a further twenty-two men from San Bernardino county would be leaving for Camp Lewis, Washington; how Lieutenant De Vere Harden, the first American wounded in France was awarded the war cross by the French government. Other stories highlighted the alleged brutality of the Germans from the perspective of a released POW; and the death of a female Y.M.C.A. worker killed by a German bomb in Paris. Further, in addition to the story about the *Agassiz*, there was a curious local story about San Bernardino's local Moose Lodge no.476 evicting a bible study class for "suspected sedition," the implication in the story was that members of the bible group were pacifists and thus unpatriotic and unsupportive of the war effort, a position the loyal Moose could not tolerate.<sup>47</sup>

By March 24, 1918, as the British were being pushed back to the Somme River, the *Sun* continued to provide accurate, informational reports on the brutal fighting; the "British Front is Driven Back Over a Line of Near 22 Miles" as the *Sun* reported that the "Germans have forced their way forward over a front approximately twenty-one miles in length, have penetrated to a depth of four or five miles west of Cambrai and have reached Ham, west of St. Quentin, about nine miles west of the British lines as the stood before the attack on Thursday" (reporting on the events of March 22, 1918).<sup>48</sup> The *Sun* also published a story about new German artillery that "rained nine-inch shells into Paris for hours."<sup>49</sup> The information available to the *Sun* through the Associated Press remained up to date and accurately described

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<sup>46</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 48, Number 20, March 23, 1918.

<sup>47</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 48, Number 20, March 23, 1918.

<sup>48</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 48, Number 21, March 24, 1918.

<sup>49</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 48, Number 21, March 24, 1918.



battlefield conditions to the *Sun*'s readers, despite the brutal conditions and the continuing uncertainty of victory. In fact, news also reached San Bernardino from neutral sources through the Associated Press, with one story discussing a Danish report from the German press that stated, "The present battles are the final and decisive exertion of strength on the part of the German people before peace comes."<sup>50</sup> Within a day of events on the battlefield, San Bernardinans received detailed, accurate information about the status of the war and conditions in Europe, as well as a steady stream of local and national patriotic stories.

The next edition, on March 26th, continued to follow the German attack in great detail under the title "GIANT ARMIES ARE STILL LOCKED IN CONFLICT," however, despite continued German gains, the tone of the news became less concerned and more optimistic as the toll of German casualties was tallied, and Washington D.C. was confident despite the gains, "U.S. Military Experts See No Cause for Alarm, West Front Situation; Generals March and Wood Believe Hun Sure to be Defeated" as the Germans were growing overextended.<sup>51</sup> The *Sun* further reported that the "British Have Practically Brought to a Halt the Great Smash by German Army on the West Front." The March 26, 1918, edition confirmed a report from General Pershing that, as of March 25th, "two regiments of American railroad engineers" were attached to British units and engaged in combat as American reserves were used to bolster allied lines.<sup>52</sup> For Americans, this was the first time American units actively participated in the campaign, albeit as attachments to British units, and helped reinforce the significance of U.S. involvement and patriotic pride therein.

Reflecting the patriotic pride incumbent with direct American involvement, the March 26th edition of the *Sun* published two stories in the middle of the front page about patriotism and domestic support of the war effort. The first story

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<sup>50</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 48, Number 21, March 24, 1918.

<sup>51</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 48, Number 22, March 26, 1918.

<sup>52</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 48, Number 22, March 26, 1918.

described a fight in Benton, Illinois between Mrs. Francis Pergen—of Bohemian birth—and Henry Baker after Mr. Baker heard Mrs. Pergen make “disloyal remarks while waiting for her mail.”<sup>53</sup> Mr. Baker was arrested and fined, although his fine was paid “by public subscription,” whereas the accented Mrs. Pergen was “ridden on a rail through the main street” by several hundred members of the loyalty league.<sup>54</sup> Meanwhile, in the town of Lima, Ohio, a mob of patriotic citizens was “making a house-to-house canvass, dragging every suspected pro-German from his bed, taking him downtown and forcing him to salute the American flag, under pain of being hanged to a tree.”<sup>55</sup> While the *Sun* often ran patriotic news pieces, it is likely that the new, direct involvement of American units in the battle significantly increased the emotional stakes whereby, despite the almost farcical nature of these stories, they nevertheless represent both a warning and a rallying cry to people at home regarding proper conduct, loyalty, and support for America’s fighting men.

As Operation *Michael* began to stall as increasing allied reinforcements were brought to bear, the news reported to the people of San Bernardino similarly improved; on March 27th, the *Sun*’s front page headline was “OFFENSIVE IS SHOWING SIGNS OF SLOWING DOWN THOUGH FIGHTING HEAVY.”<sup>56</sup> The next day, the *Sun* contained further stories of massive “German Losses Estimated at 400,000 in Offensive” and “ALLIED ARMIES STRIKE BACK.”<sup>57</sup> By March 29, 1918, the news was that the German advance had been halted, and the *Entente* forces were retaking territory.<sup>58</sup> Further, the *Sun*’s stories showed an increased interest and pride in direct American involvement with stories about the area of front held by Americans and a quasi-biographical piece about General Von Gallwitz, the

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<sup>53</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 48, Number 22, March 26, 1918.

<sup>54</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 48, Number 22, March 26, 1918.

<sup>55</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 48, Number 22, March 26, 1918.

<sup>56</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 48, Number 23, March 27, 1918.

<sup>57</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 48, Number 24, March 28, 1918.

<sup>58</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 48, Number 25, March 29, 1918.

German officer holding the front opposite American forces.<sup>59</sup> Readers were kept informed and were provided up-to-date information on the status of the battle and the war in general as the March 30th headline read “GERMAN SMASH HAS COME TO HALT,” and the American press reported on increasing American involvement either transporting supplies (March 31st) or sending 100,000 fresh troops to join the front (April 2nd).<sup>60</sup> By April 6th and 7th, the news from the front was less concerning as the German attack petered out, with the *Sun* reporting that “ALLIED LEGIONS STANDING FIRM BEFORE CITY OF AMIENS” and the focus of the *Sun*’s stories shifted to more general war stories such as the beginning of the liberty loan drive on April 6th, and local military recruitment updates.<sup>61</sup> Although the war still dominated the pages of the *Sun*, the frenetic fervor of the reporting during the dangerous early days of Operation *Michael* was slowly replaced by more mundane war reporting. By early April, with the passing of the immediate military emergency in France, the *Sun*’s stories began to focus on more mundane stories such as the victory loan program, local recruitment, and general war stories. In particular, the shift in focus from the coverage of the German offensive to liberty loans shows the *Sun* presenting stories focused on the future conduct of the war rather than the exigent need presented by one contemporaneous battle. In other words, by selecting stories about liberty loans and recruitment in early April, the *Sun* implicitly recognized and communicated that the time of greatest danger and uncertainty had passed, and that America must therefore prepare for the next challenge.

The *Sun*’s reporting on Operation *Michael* occurred in an atmosphere of serious concern and military uncertainty. Germany had transferred hundreds of thousands of troops from the Eastern

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<sup>59</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 48, Number 25, March 29, 1918.

<sup>60</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 48, Number 26, March 30, 1918; San Bernardino Sun; Volume 48, Number 27, March 31, 1918; San Bernardino Sun; Volume 48, Number 28, April 2, 1918.

<sup>61</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 48, Number 32, April 6, 1918; San Bernardino Sun; Volume 48, Number 33, April 7, 1918.

Front to the West to create significant local force superiority. Although American forces were not yet committed in large numbers, the *Entente* defense in *Michael* included the first use of American units on the front line in France, albeit in support of the British Expeditionary Force. *Michael* was reported as the largest battle of the war, and American readers, including those of the *Sun*, were kept informed on a daily basis, in great detail, on the conduct of the battle.

Additionally, stories presented by the *Sun* were of a remarkably varied perspective. Although the majority of the non-local war stories printed were provided by the Associated Press, many stories also originated from neutral sources like the Danes or even hostile sources like the German foreign ministry. The inclusion of multiple perspectives demonstrates the relatively open transmission of information through the American press and a lack of censorship from American authorities.<sup>62</sup> Although technological limitations, especially the daily publication/print cycle of newspapers, meant that there was a delay of roughly one day between the occurrence of events and publication, the *Sun*'s readers were kept remarkably well informed of the events in Europe through a wide selection of factual news stories and local interest and patriotic pieces bringing the war and participation therein home to San Bernardinans. In fact, the quality of the information provided to readers is not dissimilar to the quality of modern press reports, factual information, whether good or bad news and the use of a variety of news sources to provide a balanced interpretation of events.

### ***Champagne-Marne, 15–18 July 1918***

Despite inflicting massive casualties on the *Entente* armies and

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<sup>62</sup> Beginning in April 1917, the government Committee on Public Information (CPI) controlled the flow of war information to the Press. The CPI's head, George Creel made it the CPI's policy to transmit both good news and bad news as Mr. Creel believed that openness would lead to increased patriotic participation and support. (See Axelrod, 107).

taking large amounts of territory, the German spring offensives, including Operation *Michael*, failed to achieve any of their strategic objectives. Further, while German resources were limited, American units were arriving on the Western Front in ever greater numbers to bolster the *Entente*. Although the *Entente* was able to recover from the horrendous casualties of the spring offensives, the Germans could not. In a last, desperate attempt to win the war, Ludendorff planned a further attack on the British Expeditionary Force through Flanders. To conceal the intent of that attack, Ludendorff planned a diversionary offensive against the French Fourth Army and its attached American units. However, the German attack on prepared French positions immediately stalled. By July 18, 1918, the *Entente* forces were reinforced and counter-attacked, driving the Germans back and putting them on the strategic defensive for the remainder of the war. As the Germans advanced on the Marne River, they met intense resistance from *Entente* units, including the famous “Rock of the Marne,” the 38th infantry regiment of the U.S. 3d infantry division.<sup>63</sup> This was the last German strategic offensive of the war and a battle in which an American unit played a pivotal role.

The *San Bernardino Sun* did not publish on Monday, July 15, 1918, so the first reporting on the Champagne-Marne Campaign occurred on Tuesday, July 16, 1918. When the July 16th edition was published, the vast majority of the front page and significant portions of the interior pages were devoted to the successful defense of the Marne and, in particular, the role played by American forces.<sup>64</sup> The July 16, 1918 edition of the *Sun* was heavily skewed towards America’s involvement in the war and contains nineteen articles taking up the majority of the *Sun*’s news space, with three general types of articles: (1) current news from the front; (2) pro-American Government patriotic pieces; and (3) local involvement stories.<sup>65</sup> The first page was dominated by news of the war, including the headline devoted to the American and

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<sup>63</sup> Ziegler, *America’s Great War: World War I*, 97-8.

<sup>64</sup> *San Bernardino Sun*; Volume 48, Number 118, July 16, 1918.

<sup>65</sup> *San Bernardino Sun*; Volume 48, Number 118, July 16, 1918.

French defense of the Marne front the previous day: “FIRST DAY DRIVE A GERMAN DEFEAT; SAMMIES SMASH BACK TEUTON LINE.”<sup>66</sup>

The *Sun*’s stories included a detailed description of the French and American front discussing the Marne defense almost within a day of the start of the battle entitled “Great Battle is Raging Over Front of 65 Miles in Attempt to Take Rheims.”<sup>67</sup> In remarkable detail, the main story discusses the German attack on the Marne, and troop placements, admits to limited breaches of the Marne defenses, and identifies the German strategic goal of Rheims.<sup>68</sup> The level of military detail included in the story is remarkable and demonstrative of the Committee for Public Information’s policy of letting both good and bad news flow freely from the front with discussions of German armaments used; “[t]he Germans in addition to their tremendous expenditure of explosives and gas shells used numerous tanks against the lines;” up to date and militarily significant information was quickly available to the public, such as the use of German tanks.<sup>69</sup> Further articles discussed the generally positive conduct of the war with stories such as “German Hordes Have Lost Vast Deal of the ‘Pep’ in Former Drives on West,” which discusses the general exhaustion and over-stretching of German capabilities as a result of their offensives in the spring of 1918, notification that “Big Bertha” was “barking” as German long-range artillery targeted Paris and a frank discussion of previous failures in the face of German attacks and that the “Allied Lines Holding in Contrast Giving Way Before Former Drives.”<sup>70</sup> The *Sun*’s stories and headlines the following day, July 17, 1918, were equally open and descriptive of the state of the battle, describing heavy fighting “still in progress” east of

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<sup>66</sup> “Sammie” was a slang term for Uncle Sam’s Troops.

<sup>67</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 48, Number 118, July 16, 1918.

<sup>68</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 48, Number 118, July 16, 1918.

<sup>69</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 48, Number 118, July 16, 1918; Alan Axelrod, *Selling the Great War: The Making of American Propaganda*, 2009, St. Martin’s Press, 107.

<sup>70</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 48, Number 118, July 16, 1918.

Rheims, complementing the work of American, French, and Italian soldiers, and that German gains were extremely limited against *Entente* defenses.<sup>71</sup>

The stories available in the *Sun* on July 16-17, 1918, are remarkable for a number of reasons. First, the use of wireless telegraphy technology enabled information to be transmitted from France's battlefield across the Atlantic Ocean to be received, vetted, edited, and then disseminated to local newspapers throughout the United States within a day of the actual event. This is evidence of a complex network of news organizations and multi-layered communications systems that provided fresh information to the American public with only a minor delay. Americans were receiving up-to-date and daily information on the war in Europe straight to their homes through their local newspaper.

Second, the stories run in the *San Bernardino Sun* are indicative of the practical implementation of the Committee on Public Information's policy of providing the American public with accurate information on battle conditions, the military situation, and strategic goals. This demonstrated George Creel's goal of information control but without censorship, to give the public the truth and thereby rally them to the cause.<sup>72</sup> The result was an American populace that was knowledgeable about the conduct of the war and American involvement therein and thus was more easily engaged in the conduct of the war both overseas and at home.

In the two editions published during the Champagne-Marne campaign of July 15-17, 1918, the *San Bernardino Sun's* coverage consisted of more than factual "hard" news stories. A significant amount of the *Sun's* content during the campaign was of a more generic nature, unrelated to the conduct of the military campaign but nevertheless designed to elicit support for the war, engender feelings of involvement on the home front, and demonstrate the

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<sup>71</sup> *San Bernardino Sun*; Volume 48, Number 119, July 17, 1918.

<sup>72</sup> Axelrod, *Selling the Great War: The Making of American Propaganda*, 107.

pro-active patriotism of national and regional leadership. On July 16th, the *Sun* contained seven separate patriotic war pieces, most of which were sourced by the *Sun* from the Associated Press.<sup>73</sup> On July 15th, the *Sun* ran stories about the removal of German songs from California music books, a puff piece about Bismarck, North Dakota, wanting to change its name, the delivery of 450 American-made “battle planes” to the war, poetry, and a cartoon all related tangentially to the war effort.<sup>74</sup> The purposes of these stories were two-fold; first, they involved American civil society in the war effort as a patriotic endeavor, and second, they identified the *other* in an “us versus them” exercise, which further engaged civilian society in the war and highlighted its importance.

### ***Meuse-Argonne Offensive, September – 11 November 1918***

Following the failure of the German spring offensives and the arrival of large numbers of American troops, the *Entente* used their significant resource advantage to begin attacking overextended German forces until an armistice was declared on November 11, 1918. The Meuse-Argonne offensive ultimately ended the war and was thus the largest and final involvement of American troops in the Allied effort.<sup>75</sup> With American forces now independently organized into three armies, General Pershing was eager to prove American strength in an offensive against the Germans. The poor state of the German army at this time had become increasingly obvious to *Entente* leadership as a result of unexpected gains in a contemporaneous British offensive, and Pershing, therefore, ordered the Americans to attack the heavily fortified German positions along the Meuse-Argonne frontier on September 26, 1918.<sup>76</sup> Ultimately, the *Entente* armies were on the offensive for the remainder of the war, pushing the Germans back until the

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<sup>73</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 48, Number 118, July 16, 1918.

<sup>74</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 48, Number 118, July 16, 1918.

<sup>75</sup> Ziegler, *America's Great War: World War I*, 99.

<sup>76</sup> Ziegler, *America's Great War: World War I*, 99-100.



November 11th, armistice and Germany's unconditional surrender.

On September 27, 1918, the *Sun* reported on the offensive, proudly trumpeting that "AMERICANS LEAD GIGANTIC NEW ATTACK."<sup>77</sup> The patriotic pride emanates from the paper as the *Sun* published stories about the American onslaught, bragging that a "rush of Yanks twenty miles wide pushes Hun back; many towns and prisoners are taken."<sup>78</sup> The final campaign of the war had begun, and America's leading role generated significant excitement in the *Sun*.

On September 28th, there was a sense from the *Sun*'s featured stories that the *Entente* knew victory in the war was now possible, as stories such as "enemy gives ground in terrific fight" in the face of the American advance, praise for the "master strategy" of French field marshal Ferdinand Foch, and implicit recognition of the importance of the American economy to maintain the drive, in conjunction with liberty loan sales struck an optimistic chord. The *Sun*'s stories represent both hope and a vision of the future as the *Entente* increasingly pressured the Central Powers.<sup>79</sup>

September 28, 1918, marked the start of the fourth liberty bond drive, with San Bernardino city's quota set at \$1,070,800 and the county's at \$2,739,050. There was a sense of excitement that America's economic and military might were now winning the war as the Germans were being pushed back and the Bulgarians had proposed a separate armistice.<sup>80</sup> The *Sun*'s good news continued over subsequent days; "ALLIED SMASH SETS 250 MILE LINE AFIRE FROM NORTH SEA TO VERDUN" (September 29th);<sup>81</sup> the *Entente* was "demolishing Hindenburg fortified line with rapidity" as the French retook St. Quentin "and many important towns" (October 2nd);<sup>82</sup> and the *Sun* was optimistic that the

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<sup>77</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 49, Number 22, September 27, 1918.

<sup>78</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 49, Number 22, September 27, 1918.

<sup>79</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 49, Number 23, September 28, 1918.

<sup>80</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 49, Number 23, September 28, 1918.

<sup>81</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 49, Number 24, September 29, 1918.

<sup>82</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 44, Number 26, October 2, 1918.

Germans were being beaten as it crowed on October 3rd, that a “NEW RETREAT IS BEGUN BY HUN ARMY” and that there were “signs despotic control fast weakens in Germany” as neutral European countries described the “weakening of the despotic control which the military elements in Germany and Austria have imposed upon the civilian population.”<sup>83</sup>

Whereas earlier reporting focused on carnage and casualties, by the autumn of 1918, the *Sun*’s stories had a definitively more hopeful tone, clearly recognizing that this advance, with extensive American participation, was different. In fact, in conjunction with news on the diplomatic front, the battlefield news had grown increasingly exuberant, with daily reports of American and other *Entente* advances and, as one article on October 8, 1918, “German Forces Falling Back in Great Disorder.”<sup>84</sup> By mid-October, the *Sun* was printing daily updates on *Entente* advances, the collapse of German and other Central Powers’ armies, and the desperate pleas for peace from Germany’s allies.

On October 13th, the *Sun* announced that “WILSON’S PEACE TERMS ARE ACCEPTED - Germans Will Evacuate All Territory.”<sup>85</sup> The *Sun* printed a story quoting a telegram from the German foreign office acceding to President Wilson’s demands for peace.<sup>86</sup> The war seemed nearly over, although “Washington is however skeptical” and the “nation warned may not yet mean an end of the war,” a seeming response to Wilson’s demand that he would only negotiate with a democratic Germany and not an autocracy.<sup>87</sup> In fact, in the next edition on October 15th, the *Sun* quoted Wilson in its headline—“SAYS ‘AUTOCRACY MUST GO,’” as it was now clear to the *Sun*’s readers and the American public in general that the end of the war was near.<sup>88</sup> In October

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<sup>83</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 44, Number 27, October 3, 1918.

<sup>84</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 44, Number 26, October 13, 1918.

<sup>85</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 44, Number 31, October 8, 1918.

<sup>86</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 44, Number 36, October 13, 1918.

<sup>87</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 44, Number 36, October 13, 1918.

<sup>88</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 44, Number 37, October 15, 1918.

1918, the American press (the *Sun* included) kept the American public well informed of the diplomatic and military news as *Entente* forces continued to push Central Power forces back and members of the Central Powers began suing for peace. However, Wilson, who rose to the diplomatic leadership of the *Entente* powers, spurned any peace offer other than unconditional surrender that might have otherwise left the regimes of Germany and Austria intact.<sup>89</sup> On October 6, 1918, Austria asked for an armistice and pled directly to President Wilson, which highlighted his diplomatic ascendancy and further, as reported by the *Sun*, “Austro-Hungary accepts Wilson’s peace program basic principals.”<sup>90</sup> However, this was rejected without unconditional surrender and the dissolution of Austria’s autocratic regime. Diplomatically, throughout October 1918, it was clear that while American forces inexorably advanced on Germany, Wilson and the Americans were in ascendancy. Throughout the whole ordeal, San Bernardino was kept fully apprised of the military and the diplomatic situation, including spurned peace offers, counter offers, and submissions by the Central Powers.

On October 17, 1918, the *Sun* reported that “Dutch and Swiss sources” claimed that the German Kaiser was likely to abdicate, even as his armies continued to retreat and his remaining allies sued for peace.<sup>91</sup> Throughout the process of offer, counter-offer, and demand for surrender, the people of San Bernardino were kept updated within the limits of early twentieth-century technology, delayed only by regulation of the daily print cycle and the time of transmission of information from Europe via wireless to the associated press in America. Throughout October, readers of the *Sun* were kept remarkably informed of the war’s conduct and the continued *Entente* onslaught, as well as the political and diplomatic plans, despite the often-sensitive nature of the information. For example, despite active, ongoing hostilities, on October 18th, the *Sun* reported that Austria was to be dissected in

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<sup>89</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 44, Number 31, October 18, 1918.

<sup>90</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 44, Number 30, October 6, 1918.

<sup>91</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 44, Number 39, October 17, 1918.

furtherance of Wilson's demands for self-determination.<sup>92</sup> This demonstrated a significant degree of openness with the public regarding the government's plans, confidence in the newfound diplomatic clout of Woodrow Wilson and the Americans, and pride in American achievements in the war. This enthusiasm and pride is further reflected by the fact that by October 18th, the city and county of San Bernardino had both exceeded their liberty bond quotas, demonstrating continued local engagement and support of the war effort.<sup>93</sup>

On October 19, 1918, the *Sun*'s readers read about the disintegration of Austria-Hungary through stories about the Czech takeover of Prague, the resignation of ministers, and chaos in Hungary.<sup>94</sup> On October 20th, the *Sun* reported that the national liberty loan drive had exceeded its goals, demonstrating that national patriotic fervor and excitement were strong.<sup>95</sup> San Bernardino County exceeded its goal by \$500,000 (goal of \$2,739,050).<sup>96</sup> As news from the war made it increasingly obvious that the Central Powers were routed, the quantity of local patriotic "puff" pieces were reduced, to be replaced with success stories regarding the liberty loans or the war effort. It is likely that these often-frivolous stories became obsolete as events in Europe unfolded; implicitly the Germans were no longer a threat. However, although "puff" pieces were often replaced with genuine local news, stories regarding Russian communists began to appear, such as a story on October 22nd described the arrest in San Francisco of a Russian language teacher "on a charge of attempting to spread Bolsheviki propaganda, and an hour later was indicted by the United States grand jury."<sup>97</sup> The *Sun* had replaced the sensationalism of one perceived danger with another.

America's diplomatic clout was evident on October 24th,

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<sup>92</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 44, Number 40, October 18, 1918.

<sup>93</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 44, Number 40, October 18, 1918.

<sup>94</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 44, Number 41, October 19, 1918.

<sup>95</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 44, Number 42, October 20, 1918.

<sup>96</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 44, Number 42, October 20, 1918.

<sup>97</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 44, Number 43, October 22, 1918.

when the *Sun* printed an Associated Press story that President “WILSON PUTS ARMISTICE UP TO ALLIED NATIONS FOR DECISION.”<sup>98</sup> Following numerous stories about Wilson unilaterally rejecting both Austrian and German peace offers in the preceding weeks, Wilson, by placing the decision in the hands of the allied nations, enhanced his perceived reasonableness, leadership, *and* pre-eminence. Additionally, San Bernardino readers were still receiving news from within Germany itself, usually from neutral European go-betweens, such as an October 24th story about an explosion at a German munitions factory.<sup>99</sup>

By October 26, 1918, peace was inevitable, and America’s united domestic political front was beginning to show signs of fracture. Wilson sought to parlay his war leadership into another majority for his Democratic party in both houses of Congress, in response to which the *Sun* printed a rebuke of the president.<sup>100</sup> Additionally, San Bernardinans began reading about new American military commitments, including an expedition to Vladivostok in support of the White Russians in their civil war against the Bolsheviks.<sup>101</sup> Anti-Bolshevik news stories continued to be printed, positioning the Bolsheviks as America’s new enemy because the Central Powers were on the verge of defeat. The *Sun* printed stories intended to generate public support for intervention in Russia, such as one particularly lurid piece provided by the British wireless service about “Russian maidens under the jurisdiction of certain provincial Bolsheviks become the “property of the state,” when they reach the age of 18 years and are compelled to register at a government “bureau of free love.”<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 44, Number 45, October 22, 1918.

<sup>99</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 44, Number 45, October 22, 1918; additionally, although the war and the ongoing diplomatic posturing absorbed the vast majority of the *Sun*’s editorial space, other stories of great global significance were nevertheless being reported, including the rapidly escalating flu pandemic, with the *Sun* reporting that there were “866 deaths in a week in Paris from influenza.”

<sup>100</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 44, Number 47, October 26, 1918.

<sup>101</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 44, Number 47, October 26, 1918.

<sup>102</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 44, Number 47, October 26, 1918.

On October 27, 1918, the *Sun* reported that General Ludendorff had resigned.<sup>103</sup> On October 30th, San Bernardinans read that the final terms demanding an armistice were agreed upon by *Entente* political leaders at Versailles.<sup>104</sup> On October 31st, the *Sun* reported that Kaiser Wilhelm was willing to resign and that Austria was seeking a separate peace.<sup>105</sup> On November 1st, San Bernardino woke to the news that the Ottomans had surrendered.<sup>106</sup> The situation in Europe was extremely fluid and unstable. Within a day of events, the *San Bernardino Sun* was accurately reporting to its readers. On November 5th, the *Sun* reported that armistice terms were signed with Germany in Paris.<sup>107</sup> Domestic politics dominated the news on November 6th, as, despite Wilson's war prestige, the Republicans took control of the House of Representatives and gained three seats in the Senate.<sup>108</sup> Despite continuing hostilities, the *Sun's* stories thereafter increasingly focused on domestic news or the anticipated peace, with Germany's surrender viewed as a certainty. As the *Entente* waited for the formal response from Germany to the armistice terms, *Entente* forces continued to advance against fractured German resistance.<sup>109</sup> On November 12th, the *Sun* finally reported the end of the First World War to the people of San Bernardino.<sup>110</sup>

## Conclusion

This paper analyzed the *San Bernardino Sun's* reporting during four very distinct phases of the war; (1) America's entry; (2) the uncertainty and danger of Germany's Operation *Michael*, which saw *Entente* armies stressed to the breaking point; (3) the

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<sup>103</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 44, Number 48, October 27, 1918.

<sup>104</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 44, Number 50, October 30, 1918.

<sup>105</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 44, Number 51, October 31, 1918.

<sup>106</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 44, Number 52, November 1, 1918.

<sup>107</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 44, Number 53, November 5, 1918.

<sup>108</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 44, Number 56, November 6, 1918.

<sup>109</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 44, Number 58, November 8, 1918.

<sup>110</sup> San Bernardino Sun; Volume 44, Number 61, November 12, 1918.

successful defense of the Marne; and (4) the final, brutal campaign that ended the war. There are a number of conclusions that can be drawn from the stories published by the *Sun* during these periods.

First, the people of San Bernardino were well informed of events in Europe and their political and domestic repercussions in America. The news was wired to America and disseminated to newspapers through the Associated Press with a delay in delivery of only one day, which is consistent with the daily print/publication cycle of a newspaper. Longer delays only seem to occur on specific days (like Mondays) when the *Sun* did not go to print. Further, in addition to stories from American newsmen, the *Sun* published its own local interest news and had access (through the Associated Press) to stories from neutral countries like Denmark and Switzerland, information releases from the German foreign office, and the British wireless service. The variety, veracity, and scope of the news available to San Bernardinans were, therefore, substantial and remarkable.

Second, the news printed by the *Sun* was factually accurate. News from Europe included strategic and tactical details of engagements, information on new technology and weapons, prisoners captured by both sides, casualties, and territory both lost and gained. In other words, San Bernardinans were informed of both *good news* and *bad news* from the war.<sup>111</sup> Access to alternative sources like the German foreign office or neutral press agencies enhanced the quality, scope, and accuracy of the information available to the *Sun*'s readers.

Third, the *Sun*'s local interest pieces, though often of dubious informational value, demonstrated the high degree of interest in the war within San Bernardino County. As the largest newspaper in the county, the *Sun* was the primary source of information for many of the citizens of San Bernardino. The stories chosen and printed by the *Sun* were ultimately a reflection of both public opinion (albeit through the influential mind of the editors)

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<sup>111</sup> Once again, this is practical evidence of George Creel and the CPI's policy of providing balanced news to the American public.

and public interest. The *Sun*, as a for-profit paper, had a natural self-interest in printing what it believed its readers *wanted* to read (to sell copies) and also in what it believed its readers *needed* to read (genuine news of international importance). Thus, the *Sun*'s local interest stories reflect genuine feelings of excitement, fear, paranoia, and patriotism within the community, whether through irrational stories of German agents or pride in the county's liberty loan contributions, San Bernardinans were actively engaged in the war and its progress on the home front.

Fourth, the information available to the *Sun* and its readers was voluminous and detailed. The *Sun*, its readers, and the Associated Press had their pulse on the conduct of the war and the ability to modify the type of stories published accordingly. For example, as the Meuse-Argonne offensive turned into a route for German forces and increasingly signaled the end of the war, the *Sun* published different types of stories, reducing the number of local anti-German pieces and replacing them with anti-Bolshevik stories, changing the news focus from military stories to diplomatic stories is another. The *Sun*'s reporting was thus flexible and kept abreast of current events.

Other than the medium of transmission, the people of 1917-18 San Bernardino received a quality of hard, informational news during the First World War that would rival modern news organizations. Although one could argue that the patriotic "puff" pieces and local interest pieces are nothing more than the meaningless social news of their time, the sheer volume of accurate and timely information presented to the *Sun*'s readers was remarkable. These same readers were active, engaged, and one can presume that as a result of the *Sun*'s work, informed.



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### **Author Bio**

Jeff LeBlanc was born in the Canadian town of Atikokan to a mining family. His family settled along the north shore of Lake Superior, where he worked as a lifeguard and heavy equipment operator to pay for college. Jeff graduated with distinction from the University of Toronto majoring in history and classical civilizations in 2002. Jeff taught high school English in Japan and spent a year backpacking through Australia and New Zealand, before graduating from the University of La Verne law school. Jeff graduated *magna cum laude* and second in his class. He was a member of the law review editorial board member and published five times. He has been a practicing litigation and appellate attorney in Upland, California, since 2007, and in 2014 became a partner at Anderson & LeBlanc. Jeff always wanted to complete his M.A. in history and, in 2018, started an online program through the University of Nebraska at Kearney as a “hobby.” Jeff has been married to the amazingly awesome Cassi since 2007 and has four fur babies: Squeeky, Luna, Carson, and Thor. Jeff splits time between Rancho Cucamonga and Big Bear. He is an avid soccer player, martial artist, mountain biker, writer, reader, skier, craft beer drinker, traveler, and proud Rotarian.

