



Smokes for Soldiers

A Case from World War I

In the decade after World War I, American writing about the dangers of tobacco argued “the War maimed, killed, and devastated; but the worst thing the war did was entrench the (cigarette, 1928 cited in Tate, 1999)

Tobacco was not unique to World War I. In previous wars, soldiers had used it to maintain morale and discipline. But in the years during and following the First World War, cigarettes started to move into mainstream culture in Canada and the United States.

With the onset of First World War, the effort around supplying tobacco, in the face of the opposition movement and

nationalism, the tobacco industry, government leaders, the media and the public during the War.

Efforts to lead in distributing cigarettes to soldiers were determined to fight a war to steer soldiers away from alcohol. They would be less likely to seek other pleasures and established practices. The US government subsidized their sale at canteens. The US government regulated cigarette manufacturing as

of the importance of tobacco for the war effort. Tobacco soothed nerves and made it easier for the public to show their patriotism. “Our boys are giving their lives; all they

encouraging the distribution of tobacco for the war effort. Tobacco manufacturers publicly thanked the

Warren’s Christian Association



brain in the meantime, seems a little out of place in a trench where men stand in frozen blood and wait for death. (Polling, 1918 cited in Tate, 1999)

But not everyone felt this way. Some staff involved with the YMCA and other charities ~~wondered~~ about the appropriateness of distributing a substance they had previously opposed. The Woman's Christian Temperance Union in Canada argued tobacco as a gift to soldiers exposed them to "gas poison hurled upon them from the enemy's side and tobacco poison thrust upon them from the side of their mistaken friends." (Bigelow, 1916 cited in Jarrett, 2005) Health professionals also spoke out and warned of the health

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