



# Minneapolis & Tours Blog

*A friendship between the cities of Minneapolis & Tours*

## Commemorating World War I Around the World

Posted on [January 1, 2017](#) by [Sarah Johnson](#)

One hundred years ago, Americans joined the epic conflict first known as “The Great War.” Tours is one of many cities honoring those who paid the ultimate price in the four-year battle that would end with nearly 20 million casualties. In 1914, the population of Tours was approximately 70,000. When the casualties began to flow in (as with many other cities in Europe), the Tours hospital with a mere 188 beds proved to be woefully inadequate. The Red Cross opened makeshift hospitals in such places as local schools and convents. Approximately 1.3 million French soldiers died in the war, along with 200,000 civilian fatalities.

When the United States entered the war in 1917, residents of Tours became familiar with Americans in their city, which they nicknamed “Sammies” as in “the sons of Uncle Sam.” The United States army used Tours as one of their bases because of its location halfway between the combat zones and Atlantic disembarkment points. On Sundays, the American army would perform concerts along the Beranger Boulevard and many houses in Tours were decorated with American flags to celebrate Independence Day on July 4, 1918.

Nearly one million Americans made their way through Tours during World War I and, to thank the United States for their support, the city renamed the main bridge over the Loire River for Woodrow Wilson, the United States president at the time. Similar to many towns around France, Minneapolis has its own tribute to those who made the ultimate sacrifice. Victory Memorial Drive, straddling the border of Minneapolis and Robbinsdale, is a tree-lined parkway dedicated to the 568 men and women from Hennepin County killed in World War I. It is one of the largest World War I memorials in the country and was designated an official historic district in 2003.

When General John J. Pershing visited the memorial in 1921, he remarked, “I can conceive of no more fitting monument to the heroic dead of Hennepin County than this great Victory Memorial Drive with its living borders of magnificent trees. Here, present and future generations may come and witness the tribute of a grateful community to its fallen heroes, and meditate on their own duties and obligations as citizens.”

Walter Lindahl, one of the 568 Hennepin County residents killed in battle and honored by the establishment of this historic parkway, wrote home from somewhere in France on July 26, 1918: “Dearest Mother, I am getting hardened to this life now so I am getting confidence in myself and feel a little more able to grapple with this crisis that is now before us. I can now see nothing but victory in sight and soon everything will be bright and maybe, if God allows, your humble son will return again.”

The 100th anniversary of the Americans arrival in France during World War I will be commemorated during the [Foire de Tours](#) in May, a regional exhibition which will highlight Minnesota as this year’s featured guest. The Foire is free and open to the public – we invite you to join us in our sister city later this year.