

Patriotism and Protest: Joseph T. Angelo and the Bonus March

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“The place for war veterans is not in breadlines!”¹

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Joseph T. Angelo quit a well-paid job at the DuPont Powder Works in Carney’s Point, New Jersey, to join the army. On September 26, 1918, he saved the life of then Lt. Colonel (temporary) George S. Patton Jr., an act that earned him the Distinguished Service Cross and provided him with a lifetime of minor renown. By 1931, during the Great Depression, Angelo was unemployed. He walked 160 miles to Washington, DC, from his hometown of Camden, New Jersey, to testify in front of Congress in support of immediate payment of the wartime bonuses promised to veterans of World War I. The following summer, he was among the Bonus Marchers who were brutally driven out of their encampments in the nation’s capital by the same U.S. military in which they had served during wartime.

This article tells Angelo’s story, and by doing so, it tells the story of the tens of thousands of desperate veterans of the Great War who united to form an ethnically and racially diverse movement to protest for what they believed was right and just. They had made sacrifices to defend American values on the battlefield and now sought to be treated in a manner they saw as fair.

“I come to show you people that we need our bonus,” declared the rail-thin Joseph Thomas Angelo, a veteran of the First World War, to the members of the House Ways and Means Committee. Exhaustion and desperation showed in his face as the medals he had earned for his service on the battlefields of France dangled from his jacket, clanking every time he adjusted his posture. Angelo had earned the Distinguished Service Cross for “extraordinary

¹ “Veterans Urge Action on Cash Bonus Plan,” *New York Times*, 29 December 1930, 21.

heroism” in battle, saving the life of his commanding officer, Lt. Colonel George S. Patton Jr. “My comrade and I hiked here from nine o’clock Sunday morning, when we left Camden,” he explained. “I done it all by my feet—shoe leather.” In February 1931, during the Great Depression, Angelo walked 160 miles to the nation’s capital from his hometown of Camden, New Jersey, to lobby for passage of a bill sponsored by Representative Wright Patman of Texas, a Democrat, populist, and fellow veteran, that mandated the immediate payment at face value of adjusted compensation certificates or wartime bonuses, which had been deferred to 1945. “We wouldn’t want it if we didn’t need it,” he said softly. “I represent 1,800 from Jersey. They are just like myself—men out of work.”²

The Patman bill never made it to the House floor for a vote, but by June 1932, at the height of the Great Depression, Joseph T. Angelo returned to Washington as another incarnation of the bill, the so-called Patman bonus bill, was making its way through Congress. He was one of tens of thousands of unemployed, homeless, and frustrated veterans who arrived in Washington, many with their families, seeking economic relief and hoping to capture the attention of the federal government and the nation to their plight. These veterans had served in the segregated American Expeditionary Force (AEF), and now they were members of the integrated Bonus Expeditionary Force (BEF), otherwise known as the Bonus Army. Some of the veterans wore the old uniforms they had stowed away in a closet or the service medals that they had kept in a box for safekeeping. Black veterans, who had come home to racial violence and societal ingratitude for their patriotic sacrifices, stood shoulder to shoulder with their white comrades demanding

² Joseph T. Angelo’s testimony before the House Ways and Means Committee, 4 February 1931, in *Payment of Soldiers’ Adjusted Compensation Certificates: Hearings Before the Committee on Ways and Means, House of Representatives, Seventy-first Congress, Third Session, on House Bills Numbered 3490 . . . Indexed January 29, 30, and 31, and February 2, 3, 4, and 5, 1931* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1931), 382. Angelo’s testimony was also covered in “Young Favors Cash Bonus for Needy Veterans Only; Urges Federal Bank Curb,” *New York Times*, 5 February 1931, 3.

their just due for proudly serving their nation. There were men who returned from the war physically disabled, marching with the use of wheelchairs, braces, and other medical devices as well as those who wore the psychological scars of battle that time never healed and economic hardship had only made worse. All were there to stand up for what they believed was fair and right.

The Bonus Army came to Washington to be heard; they came to Washington to ask for money they believed they were owed; and they came to Washington to exercise their right as citizens to assemble and protest peacefully, hallmarks of a democratic society. The men of the Bonus Army felt empowered to confront their elected officials based on their service in defense of the nation and its ideals. Military service and sacrifice were irrefutable acts of patriotism that justified and legitimated demands for a bonus that had been rightfully earned and was now sorely needed. In the wake of the Great Depression, they roundly criticized the corporations and financiers who profited from the Great War while at the same time rejecting the radicalism of the communist movement. In a fiery speech to the marchers, retired Major General Smedley D. Butler of the United States Marine Corps defended the protest as “the greatest demonstration of Americanism we’ve ever had. Pure Americanism.”³ The march was certainly a demonstration of Americanism as enshrined in the First Amendment, but what does it mean to ask the government to be treated fairly? Like the patriots in Shays’s Rebellion of 1786–1787 and the Populist marchers of Coxey’s Army in 1894, the Bonus Marchers believed American values included economic fairness.

³ “Butler Addresses Demonstration: Outtakes.” Fox Movietone News Collection, 19 July 1932. <https://digital.tcl.sc.edu/digital/collection/MVTN/id/6676/rec/1>. See also “Gen. Butler Urges Bonus Army to Stick,” *New York Times*, 20 July 1932, 2. Major General Smedley D. Butler, nicknamed the “Maverick Marine,” authored the 1935 book *War is a Racket* which criticized U.S. foreign actions and the way in which business interests profited from war.

Ultimately, the veterans were disappointed when the Patman bonus bill was defeated in the U.S. Senate. Many of the old “Doughboys” returned to their homes, but those who had no place to go or who refused to quit remained, hoping for renewed support from Congress or a sympathetic ear from President Herbert Hoover. Instead, on July 28, 1932, troops commanded by Army Chief of Staff General Douglas MacArthur, also a veteran of World War I, used fixed bayonets, tear gas, cavalry, and tanks to disperse the protestors, resulting in arrests, injuries, and deaths.

Joseph T. Angelo was among the Bonus Marchers who were roused and assaulted on that fateful day. This article tells his story, and by doing so, it tells the story of the tens of thousands of desperate veterans of the Great War who united to form an ethnically and racially diverse movement to protest for what they believed was right and just. They had made sacrifices to defend American values on the battlefield and now sought to be treated in a manner they saw as fair.

Angelo was born on February 16, 1896, in Lattimer, a coal mining town formerly known as Lattimer Mines, located roughly one-mile northeast of Hazleton in eastern Pennsylvania’s Luzerne County. His father, Anthony, immigrated to the United States from Italy in 1879 at the age of 8, while his mother, Edith, and his maternal grandparents were born in New Jersey.⁴ Anthony Angelo’s family was likely lured to Lattimer by the promise of jobs in a coal mining industry that relied on immigrant labor, first Germans and Irish, and, by the second half of the nineteenth century, immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe.

By 1902, the Angelo family had moved to Camden, New Jersey. Anthony Angelo may have sought employment opportunities elsewhere that made it easier to provide financially for his family. Located on the eastern bank of the Delaware River opposite Philadelphia and

⁴ Family Search, “Joseph Angelo,” United States Census 1910 Database, <http://FamilySearch.org>.

containing a growing network of railways, Camden was an ideal location for a variety of industries, including the Campbell Soup Company, the New York Shipbuilding Corporation, and the RCA Victor Company. “On Camden’s supplies, the world relies” was a popular slogan among residents and workers.⁵ The city had a sizable immigrant population that helped swell its ranks from 20,000 in 1870 to 116,000 by 1920, and a surge of Italian and Eastern European immigrants after 1900 gradually replaced immigrants from Germany, England, and Ireland as a source of cheap labor for Camden’s growing industrial sector.⁶

Anthony Angelo obtained employment as a switchman for the Public Service Corporation, a company that helped finance and develop streetcar and energy projects across New Jersey while his wife Edith was a homemaker.⁷ At various times the Angelo family lived in rented houses, eventually settling in a row house on Carman Street in East Camden, a heavily immigrant, working-class neighborhood that was developed in the 1890s.⁸ Anthony Angelo appears to have enjoyed a degree of prominence in his community with reports of a birthday celebration and family trip in 1910 to nearby Vincentown, New Jersey, highlighted in the local paper.⁹ Growing up, Joseph T. Angelo more than likely attended local public schools in Camden that were racially segregated at the elementary level. He spent a year in reform school and, by

⁵ Jeffery M. Dorwart and Philip English Mackey, *Camden County, New Jersey, 1616–1976: A Narrative History* (Camden County Cultural & Heritage Commission, 1976), 75–77. For Camden’s popular slogan see <https://www.camdencounty.com/enjoy-camden-county/history/>.

⁶ Dorwart and Mackey, *Camden County*, 89–90. For additional discussion of the impact of immigration on Camden’s population and industrial sector in the early 20th century see Jefferson Cowie, *Capital Moves: RCA’s Seventy-Year Quest for Cheap Labor* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 15–16; Fred Reiss, *Public Education in Camden, N.J.: From Inception to Integration* (New York: iUniverse, Inc., 2005), 165; and Howard Gillette Jr. *Camden After the Fall: Decline and Renewal in a Post-Industrial City* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

⁷ “Anthony D. Angelo Dies in Delair at age of 67,” *Morning Post* (Camden, NJ), 24 January 1938, 4. The January 22 edition of the *Courier-Post* had erroneously announced that his son, Joseph T. Angelo, had passed away. The publishers of the paper blamed the mistake on an error in the transmission of names.

⁸ Phil Cohen, “Heroes of Camden: Private First Class Joseph T. Angelo,” accessed 15 June 2020, <http://www.dvrbs.com/camden-heroes/CamdenHeroes-JosephTAngelo.htm>. See account in the *Camden Post-Telegram* (Camden, NJ), 5 July 1910, 9.

⁹ *Camden Post-Telegram* (Camden, NJ), 5 July 1910, 9.

1915, worked as a laborer. By the time he was 21, Angelo had relocated to Penns Grove, New Jersey, about 28 miles south of Camden, and found a job at the DuPont Powder Works in nearby Carney's Point earning \$1.25 an hour, a good wage at the time.¹⁰

In the summer of 1914, World War I began in Europe between the Allies of Great Britain, France, and Russia, and the Central Powers of Imperial Germany, the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, and later the Ottoman Empire. Despite President Woodrow Wilson's declaration of strict U.S. neutrality, many American companies benefitted financially by selling munitions and supplies to the belligerents, particularly the Allies. New Jersey's location between two major ports—New York City and Philadelphia—on the Atlantic coast helped its businesses profit by swiftly meeting the Allies' demands for supplies. The DuPont Company was no exception as gunpowder and explosives manufactured at its factories supplied the Allied armies. To meet the need for gunpowder, chemicals, and explosives, DuPont expanded its Carney's Point factory to almost 70 times its prewar capacity and increased its labor force by 25,000 workers.¹¹ In April 1917, after President Wilson had proclaimed that "the world must be made safe for democracy," Congress declared war on Imperial Germany. The United States joined the Allies, and DuPont's fortunes expanded further. Many of its workers continued to benefit from stable, good-paying jobs at the company, but others either enlisted or were drafted into the U.S. military.

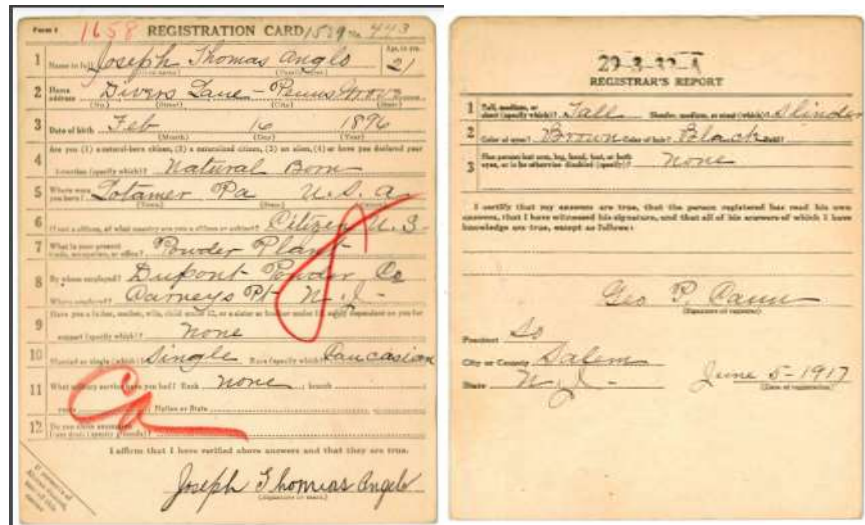
One of those workers was Joseph T. Angelo, who enlisted in the U.S. Army on December 12, 1917, with three of his coworkers after a challenge that he was "yellow."¹² Angelo was sent

¹⁰ "Indestructible Veteran, 76, Recalls Two Pattons," *Courier-Post* (Camden, NJ), 17 February 1972, 11. For Joseph T. Angelo's claim of earning \$1.25 an hour at the DuPont Powder Works, refer to his testimony before the House Ways and Means Committee, 4 February 1931, in *Payment of Soldiers' Adjusted Compensation Certificates*, 387.

¹¹ "New Jersey and the Great War," The United States World War I Centennial Commission, accessed on 3 August 2020, <https://www.worldwar1centennial.org/nj-wwi-centennial-home.html>.

¹² Joseph T. Angelo's testimony before the House Ways and Means Committee, 4 February 1931, in *Payment of Soldiers' Adjusted Compensation Certificates*, 386.

for basic training to Camp Dix in Wrightstown, New Jersey, and was assigned to the Second Company, Provisional Recruit Battalion, a replacement company for the First Regular Division. On January 23, 1918, Angelo and his unit shipped out from Hoboken, New Jersey, aboard the USS *Huron*, arriving at the port of Brest, France, in early February as part of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF), commanded by General John J. Pershing.¹³ In France, Angelo volunteered for the Tank Corps. He was assigned to the 304th, the first American tank brigade, where he served as an orderly (or aide) to the brigade commander, Lt. Colonel George S. Patton Jr. “(Patton) was one of the finest officers a man would want to serve under,” an 81-year-old Angelo remembered fondly in a 1977 interview, adding “he wouldn’t send you where he wouldn’t go himself.”¹⁴



Draft Registration Card for Joseph T. Angelo, 1917
 Courtesy of the National Archives at Atlanta, Georgia

¹³ Christiana A. Ziegler-McPherson, “Hoboken During World War One,” The United States World War I Centennial Commission, 15 December 2016, accessed on 7 March 2022, www.worldwar1centennial.org/index.php/nj-wwi-stories/1665-hoboken.html. The USS *Huron* had once been known as the SS *Friedrich der Grosse*, which belonged to the North German Lloyd Steamship Company.

¹⁴ “Patton Rescuer is a Proud Man,” *Sunday Press* (Atlantic City, NJ), 17 July 1977, 14.

On September 26, 1918, the Allies began assaulting the German defenses along the Hindenburg Line in the Argonne Forest in what became known as the Meuse-Argonne offensive, the last major offensive of the war. “We went over the top at 6:30 in the morning,” remembered Angelo. “We had 150 tanks on the move and were plowing through a dense fog.” The 304th headed toward the town of Cheppy and after a few miles met up with some American tanks at a crossroads. Patton went ahead on foot to survey the area. “The Colonel told me to remain there and be on the watch for Germans,” Angelo remembered, when “two German machine gunners” began to strafe his position. Angelo returned their fire killing one as the other ran away. “Then I thought sure hell had broken loose,” he recalled. “Bullets from machine guns just naturally rained all around.”¹⁵

During a lull in the fighting, Patton noticed several tanks stuck in the mud in front of a large trench. He “grabbed a shovel and began digging the tanks free,” while directing his men to do the same. The Germans started shelling the area and laid down heavy machine-gun fire. Unnerved, Patton ordered his troops to continue digging. He then instructed Angelo to take 15 men and “wipe out the machine gun nests.” Angelo returned to make his report to Patton. “When I told him, the infantrymen had been killed by the machine guns he ordered me to accompany him,” Angelo remembered, “declaring he would clear them out.” Patton, waving his walking stick in the air, shouted, “Let’s go, let’s go!” Angelo wondered whether “the Colonel had gone mad” in the chaos of battle. “We went about thirty yards and the Colonel fell with a bullet in his thigh,” Angelo explained.¹⁶ The shock and pain of the bullet, which had exited Patton’s body two inches from his rectum, left him unconscious and unable to move. Angelo dragged Patton into a

¹⁵ Lawrence M. Kaplan, ed. *Pershing’s Tankers: Personal Accounts of the AEF Tank Corps in World War I* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2018), 190.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

shell hole, cut his trousers, and bandaged his wounds.¹⁷ Patton momentarily regained consciousness and instructed Angelo “to get out on top of our shell hole and prevent oncoming tanks from getting below us.”¹⁸ After successfully carrying out the order, Angelo found four soldiers to take Patton, still conscious but suffering from a heavy loss of blood, to the medic tent at the rear of the American lines. He was sent to Hospital 11 for immediate surgery and awoke the next morning dazed but otherwise feeling well.¹⁹

The armistice of November 11, 1918, effectively ended the fighting in World War I. The 304th Tank Brigade remained in France until March 2, 1919, when the unit, including Private Angelo, boarded the SS *Patria* at the French port of Marseilles, bound for the United States. The ship arrived in a fog-draped New York harbor to great fanfare on March 17, docking at the foot of 31st Street in Brooklyn, New York.²⁰ The men were quarantined for several days before being sent to various demobilization centers where they were given 60 dollars and a train ticket home after their discharge.²¹

Almost immediately, Patton was deluged with interview requests from the press. The *New York Times* reported, “Colonel Patton said that when he was shot, he fell down on the field and would have been killed if it had not been for the bravery of Private Joseph Angelo, of

¹⁷ Ruth Ellen Patton Totten, *The Button Box: A Daughter's Loving Memoir of Mrs. George S. Patton* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2005), 118. Angelo used materials from his own first-aid kit as well as one he had picked up from a nearby corpse.

¹⁸ Kaplan, ed., *Pershing's Tankers*, 191.

¹⁹ Jon B. Mikolashek, *Blood, Guts, and Grease: George S. Patton in World War I* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2019), 85.

²⁰ See George S. Patton, *George S. Patton Papers: Diaries-1945: Annotated Transcripts; 1919*, 1 March 1919, Manuscript/Mixed Material (Washington, DC: Library of Congress), accessed on 30 July 2020, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mss35634020/>. See also George S. Patton, *George S. Patton Papers: Diaries-1945: Annotated Transcripts; 1919*, 2 March 1919. Manuscript/Mixed Material (Washington, DC: Library of Congress), accessed on 30 July 2020, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mss35634020/>; and “Patria Brings 304th Tank Brigade Home; Picked Men, mostly from this City, Won Two Honor Medals and 21 D. S. C.'s in France,” *New York Evening Post*, 17 March 1919, 9.

²¹ “Born of Controversy: The G.I. Bill of Rights,” accessed on 10 January 2022, www.va.gov/opa/publications/celebrate/gi-bill.pdf.

Camden, N.J., who risked his life to drag him to a shell hole.”²² In another interview, published nationwide, a grateful Patton stated that Angelo “is without doubt the bravest lad in the American army. I have never seen his equal.” He declared that Angelo “deserves all the credit for the action of the tank corps . . . in the war. Had it not been for the youngster’s bravery there should have been a different story to tell in that sector . . . Joe is the bravest man I know . . . I owe him my life and he saved the entire tank brigade. He certainly saved the day.”²³ Patton recommended Angelo for the Distinguished Service Cross, which he was awarded on December 17, 1918, and asked him to continue as his aide. Angelo gave the offer serious consideration before refusing it. “I wish I had stayed in the Army,” he later lamented, “but I wanted to come home.”²⁴



Joseph T. Angelo with Distinguished Service Cross, 1918
Wikimedia Commons

²² “Returning Troops Object to Hearst; Protest Bearing Soldiers’ Names Thrown from Patria to the Mayor’s Welcome Ship,” *New York Times*, 18 March 1919, 24.

²³ “Camden Doughboy Saved Commander; Joseph Angelo carried wounded Colonel to Shell Hole under Rain of Bullets: Thrilling Story by Modest Hero,” *Camden Post-Telegram* (Camden, NJ), 18 March 1919, 9.

²⁴ “Joseph T. Angelo/Distinguished Service Cross,” The Hall of Valor Project, accessed on 3 February 2023, <https://valor.militarytimes.com/hero/10459>; and “Patton Rescuer is a Proud Man,” 14. Angelo recalled that the commander of the Tank Corps, Gen. Samuel Rockenbach, pinned the Distinguished Service Cross on his uniform during a ceremony in France.

Angelo returned to Camden a local hero. In addition to the Distinguished Service Cross, he was awarded the French War Medal and the French Croix de Guerre. Headlines from across the United States celebrated the heroism of the “Italian soldier” and “Jersey Boy” who earned the title of “bravest man in the U.S. army.”²⁵ Angelo spoke to audiences at churches and civic organizations across Camden, regaling them with stories of his heroic actions. As one local newspaper put it, Angelo was “Camden’s own Sergeant York,” a reference to Medal of Honor recipient Sergeant Alvin C. York of the 82nd Division who became a national hero for saving his platoon by killing 25 enemy soldiers and capturing another 132.²⁶



Camden Post-Telegram, March 18, 1919

Despite his newfound fame, Angelo faced a challenging readjustment to civilian life. While he was overseas, his mother had died in October 1918 of influenza at the age of 48. The first wave of the “Spanish flu,” as it was called at the time, was identified in the United States in early 1918, spreading quickly after being detected among military personnel at Camp Funston in

²⁵ “Italian Soldier Proves a Hero,” *Los Angeles Times*, 31 May 1919, 17; “‘Bravest Man in Yank Army’ is Jersey Boy,” *Evening Review* (East Liverpool, OH), 5 April 1919, 7; and “‘Bravest Man in U.S. Army,’ Compliment Bestowed on Jersey Boy by his Tank Commander,” *Evening News* (Wilkes-Barre, PA), 7 April 1919, 4.

²⁶ “Veteran Here Saved Life of Patton in War,” *Courier-Post* (Camden, NJ), 10 November 1942, 3.

Kansas in March. A second deadlier wave struck in August, affecting all the nations embroiled in the war. Influenza hit Camden especially hard that fall, in part a consequence of a Liberty Loan Drive Parade, characterized as the deadliest parade in American history, held in Philadelphia on September 28. A week later more than 4,500 Philadelphians were dead from the effects of the virus, and by October, the pandemic had spread to nearby Camden.²⁷ In the end, more than 50 million died worldwide with roughly 675,000 deaths in the United States.

Less than a year after the death of his wife, Joseph's father married Esther Bilby Jobes, a neighbor and widow with two children whose husband had also died of influenza that October. By September 1919, Anthony and Esther Angelo had a child of their own, Margarete. Joseph T. Angelo's relationship with his father had been strained prior to the war, and the returning soldier struggled with the changes that had occurred in his family during his absence. "I got a wonderful send off when I went to France," Angelo jokingly recalled. "My father threw me out." It wasn't until his return that he learned of his father's remarriage to a woman whom he held in low regard. "I said, she is the last woman you want on earth. He says, that is my wife!" After a heated argument, Esther demanded that the recently returned soldier leave, and his father supported her wishes. "That was my welcome home, and I got out," Angelo later explained.²⁸

As a civilian, Angelo tried but failed to gain a job with the Camden Fire Department, eventually finding employment at one of the city's shipyards. He joined the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) and in November 1922 married Sara Elizabeth Force, also from Camden. The young couple initially settled in the Cramer Hill section of East Camden where their only child,

²⁷ Kenneth C. Davis, "Philadelphia Threw a WWI Parade that Gave Thousands of Onlookers the Flu," *Smithsonian Magazine*, 21 September 2018, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/philadelphia-threw-wwi-parade-gave-thousands-onlookers-flu-180970372/>. See also Alfred W. Crosby, *America's Forgotten Pandemic: The Influenza of 1918* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

²⁸ Joseph T. Angelo's testimony before the House Ways and Means Committee, 4 February 1931, in *Payment of Soldiers' Adjusted Compensation Certificates*, 388.

Betty, was born in October 1923. Soon thereafter, they moved to a small bungalow-style house that Angelo had built himself on Holman Avenue in the Delair section of Pennsauken, a few miles from East Camden. Angelo worked as a car repairman for a local railroad but lost his job at the start of the Great Depression.²⁹ He wasn't alone as one out of every four American workers was unemployed, including some 750,000 veterans.³⁰

By 1931, Angelo was involved in a struggle by veterans of the First World War to receive cash payment at face value of the bonuses the government had promised them in 1924 for their service to the nation. In the United States, the practice of providing veterans with additional compensation dates back to the colonial era. Authorities followed English precedent, providing for the relief and support of soldiers who were wounded in wars to encourage enlistments in the local militia. The Continental Congress expanded the practice during the Revolutionary War to also provide payments to dependents of soldiers killed in battle. In the years following the American Revolution, Congress frequently grappled with the economic costs of offering pensions to able-bodied veterans for their service. After the Civil War, more than one-fifth of the federal budget was allocated to provide veterans with compensation. Although the original intent was to care for disabled veterans and their dependents, at the start of the twentieth century most pensioners were receiving general service pensions.³¹

The large number of World War I veterans brought into sharp focus the effect that the pension system would have on the federal treasury, causing some concern among government

²⁹ Family Search, "Joseph Angelo," United States Census 1930 Database. <http://FamilySearch.org>; "Indestructible Veteran," 11; Cohen, "Heroes of Camden."

³⁰ Stephen R. Ortiz, *Beyond the Bonus March and GI Bill: How Veteran Politics Shaped the New Deal Era* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 33.

³¹ Paul Dickson and Thomas B. Allen, *The Bonus Army: An American Epic* (New York: Walker and Company, 2004), 2–5; Glenn C. Altschuler and Stuart M. Blumin, "Before the G.I. Bill: Veterans and Politics from the Revolution through World War I," chap. 1 in *The G.I. Bill: A New Deal for Veterans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 11–34; and Robert G. Bodenger, "Soldiers' Bonuses: A History of Veterans' Benefits in the United States, 1776–1967" (PhD Diss., Pennsylvania State University, 1971).

officials. The veterans, however, believed that they deserved financial compensation for the service they rendered to the nation, and veterans' organizations like the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the War Veterans' Protective Association demanded that they be compensated beyond their wartime pay. Six years after the armistice, when the U.S. economy was thriving, Congress passed the World War Adjusted Compensation Bill or "Soldiers Bonus Bill," which called on the government to provide veterans an "adjusted compensation" of \$1.25 for each day served overseas and \$1 for each day served stateside. Anyone who was owed \$50 or less would be paid immediately; the others were given a certificate that would collect 4 percent interest with an additional 25 percent upon payment. Industrialists like Pierre S. du Pont, the president of General Motors whose family owned the DuPont Powder Works where Angelo had worked, lobbied against the bill, and du Pont charged that the veterans were "the most favored class in the United States."³² President Calvin Coolidge attempted to defeat the bill through presidential veto. Coolidge, who had not served in the military, suggested that "the gratitude of the nation to these veterans cannot be expressed in dollars and cents. . . Patriotism which is bought and paid for is not patriotism."³³ Although Congress overrode Coolidge's veto, the veterans had little cause to celebrate, dubbing the payment the "Tombstone Bonus" since it was not payable until 1945 or to a veteran's dependents upon his death, whichever came first.³⁴

In May 1929, five months before the stock market crash that brought on the Great Depression, Representative Wright Patman co-sponsored a bill in the House of Representatives that authorized immediate payment at face value of the wartime bonus financed by the sale of 15-year bonds. It never made it out of committee. By 1930, as the Great Depression deepened,

³² Michael A. Bellesiles, *A People's History of the U.S. Military: Ordinary Soldiers Reflect on their Experience of War, from the American Revolution to Afghanistan* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 218.

³³ President Calvin Coolidge's veto message of H.R.7959, Veteran Compensation, 15 May 1924, www.coolidgefoundation.org/resources/veto-of-h-r-7959-may-15-1924.

³⁴ Dickson and Allen, *Bonus Army*, 1, 30.

the number of unemployed veterans had overwhelmed the charitable capacity of local veterans' relief committees and national veterans' organizations.³⁵ Veterans demanded government action on the cash bonus plan. At a New York City rally sponsored by the War Veterans' Protective Association in December 1930, one veterans' rights advocate asserted, "The place for war veterans is not in breadlines!"³⁶

However, by 1931, more veterans like Joseph T. Angelo found themselves on breadlines and relying on charitable contributions to make ends meet. To delay payment of the bonus until 1945 when they and their families were already suffering was, they argued, a shameful way to treat former soldiers who had fought for the nation. Yet, in a speech to the American Legion at its annual convention in October 1930, President Hoover declared that the nation's defense was "the duty of citizens" and suggested that "the demand upon the Government should not exceed the measure that justice requires and self help can provide."³⁷ As a result, the American Legion's national leadership did not endorse immediate payment. Failing to convince the Legion's leadership of the efficacy of immediate payment, Representative Patman, a member of the Legion, courted the VFW's leaders, who had supported the issue for more than a year. In January 1931, with support from the VFW, he re-introduced his bill which had to compete with 47 other bonus-related proposals as the House Ways and Means Committee scheduled hearings for later that month.³⁸

On January 21, one week before the start of the hearings, roughly 1,000 VFW-affiliated veterans marched along Pennsylvania Avenue demanding immediate payment of their bonuses.

³⁵ "Veterans Here Ask Cash Compensation: Start National Drive Backing Proposed Negotiable Bonds as Relief Measure," *New York Times*, 9 December 1930, 3.

³⁶ "Veterans Urge Action," 21.

³⁷ "President's Address to the Legion," *New York Times*, 7 October 1930, 22.

³⁸ Ortiz, *Beyond the Bonus March*, 30. See also William Pencak, *For God & Country: The American Legion, 1919–1941* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989), 197. The National Commander of the American Legion at the time was Ralph T. O'Neil of Kansas. He was succeeded in September 1931 as National Commander by Henry L. Stevens Jr. of North Carolina.

They were met on the steps of the Capitol building by Patman and several other representatives who accepted their petitions in support of the Texas legislator's bill. Patman addressed the assemblage justifying the payment as appropriate and well-earned by men who had served their country. "In asking for the payment of the face value of these certificates in cash now, we are not asking for the payment of a gratuity . . . Neither are we asking to raid the Treasury. We are simply asking for the payment of an honest debt heretofore confessed by Congress to veterans of the World war," a debt, he noted, that was "long past due."³⁹



**Veterans protesting bonus bill delay are addressed by Representative Wright Patman of Texas, January 1931
Library of Congress**

Patman also expressed a sense of moral outrage that large corporations that had contributed to the war effort, like Joseph T. Angelo's former employer DuPont, had already been

³⁹ "Wright Patman Speaks to Veterans in Washington," *Daily News-Telegram* (Sulphur Springs, TX), 4 February 1931, 4. See also Ortiz, *Beyond the Bonus March*, 46.

paid in full by the federal government while veterans had to wait until 1945 for payment of a bonus that they had rightfully earned.⁴⁰ Four days after the Bonus rally at the Capitol, the leadership of the American Legion decided to support the bonus. Although the Legion did not endorse a specific proposal, its new stance had an impact in Congress with many members supporting the bonus, either as a full cash payout or as some form of partial payment.⁴¹

The much-anticipated hearings on the bonus, including the Patman bill, began on January 29, 1931. Secretary of the Treasury Andrew Mellon, financier and industrialist, opened the hearings by questioning whether full payment of the adjusted-service certificates at their present value constituted a real benefit to the veterans. He repeated his well-known position that the proposal would be “a serious impediment to business recovery” and lead to “a retardation of the day when normal employment is available.”⁴² Mellon’s testimony was followed over the next several days by a parade of corporate executives and bankers who agreed that immediate payment of the bonus was essentially a temporary dole for veterans that would lead to an unnecessary increase in federal taxes, cause inflation to soar, and “frustrate the slow but sure revival of sound American prosperity.”⁴³ Others supported full and immediate payment of the bonus. Paul C. Wolman, the former VFW National Commander, voiced his organization’s support for the bill, stating that it would not only provide for the welfare of “disabled and needy ex-service men, but also act as a marvelous stimulant to existing economic conditions.”⁴⁴

⁴⁰ “Wright Patman Speaks to Veterans in Washington,” *Daily News-Telegram* (Sulphur Springs, TX), 4 February 1931, 4.

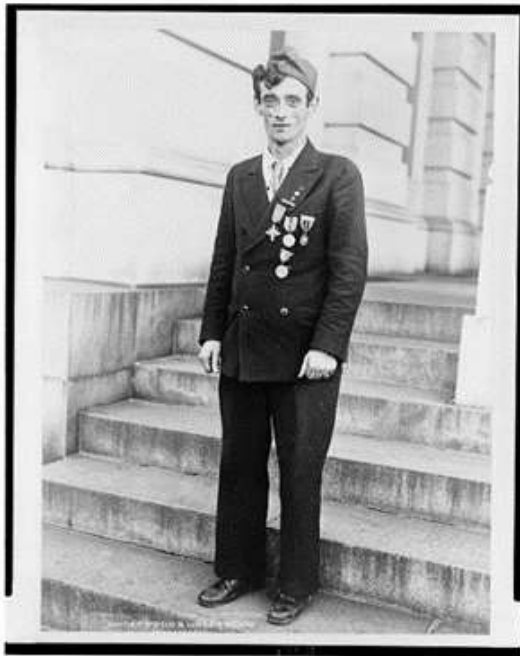
⁴¹ Ortiz, *Beyond the Bonus March*, 38.

⁴² Andrew Mellon’s testimony before the House Ways and Means Committee, 29 January 1931, in *Payment of Soldiers’ Adjusted Compensation Certificates*, 1–9.

⁴³ The quote is from the testimony of Charles M. Woolley, Chairman of the Board, American Radiator Company, New York City, before the House Ways and Means Committee, 3 February 1931, in *Ibid*, 310.

⁴⁴ Paul C. Wolman’s testimony before the House Ways and Means Committee, 31 January 1931, in *Payment of Soldiers’ Adjusted Compensation Certificates*, 131. At the time of his testimony, Wolman was the chairman of the VFW’s Cash Payment Campaign Committee. See Ortiz, *Beyond the Bonus March*, 47.

The most compelling testimony, however, did not come from wealthy corporate executives and bankers nor from veterans' rights advocates, but from Joseph T. Angelo, the unemployed, decorated veteran from Camden, New Jersey. Angelo was introduced to the committee on February 4 by Representative Charles A. Wolverton, a Republican who represented New Jersey's First Congressional District, which included Camden.⁴⁵ Wolverton was a vocal proponent of the bonus and would later go on to support a number of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal policies. Angelo recounted how he had walked 160 miles to Washington to personally make the case that immediate payment at face value of the bonus would help veterans like himself who were in dire need of financial assistance. He represented the Corporal Mathews-Purnell Post No. 518, Veterans of Foreign Wars of Camden and had come



to present a petition signed by 1,800 needy Camden veterans like himself. The post was currently \$150 in debt and struggling to provide financial support to its members. Angelo was given just 5 minutes to testify but proceeded to speak for 20 minutes.⁴⁶

**Joseph T. Angelo, wearing suit with medals received for service during World War I, February 5, 1931
Library of Congress**

⁴⁵ "Millions Paid New Jersey Veterans: Bonus Loans Increase State's Wealth," *Asbury Park Press* (Asbury Park, NJ), 29 April 1931, 2.

⁴⁶ "Camden Vet Hikes 4 Days to Ask Cash," *Morning Post* (Camden, NJ), 5 February 1931, 1. See also Joseph T. Angelo's testimony before the House Ways and Means Committee, 4 February 1931, in *Payment of Soldiers' Adjusted Compensation Certificates*, 384. The Corporal Mathews-Purnell Post No. 518 opened in 1921 and was located for many years at 2712 Hayes Avenue in Camden, New Jersey.

“I have got a little home . . . that I built with my own hands after I came home from France,” Angelo explained. “Now, I expect to lose that little place.” He told the committee that he owed taxes and the \$4 in local public assistance he received was simply not enough to save his house and to take care of his family. “I cannot put no coal in my cellar,” Angelo confessed. Although he had borrowed some money to help make ends meet, he didn’t understand how he could be in debt and hungry while holding a certificate valued at \$1,444. Representative James A. Frear, a Wisconsin Republican, asked him what his business was. Angelo responded: “Nothing—I am nothing but a bum now.” He explained that he “had not worked for a year and a half” because “there is no work in my home town.” These statements stood in stark contrast to the story of battlefield heroism that the veteran also related to the committee, proudly referring to the Distinguished Service Cross that hung from his jacket as “the highest medal in America for enlisted men.” The committee members were duly impressed as Angelo described how he had saved Patton’s life. He then displayed a Tiffany gold watch engraved on the back with the words “Joseph Angelo D.S.C. From Mrs. George S. Patton, Jr., in grateful remembrance of the Argonne, Sep. 26, 1918” and a gold bullet stickpin with a pearl in front given to him by the colonel’s mother.⁴⁷ Representative Henry Rainey, a Democrat from Illinois, called Angelo’s retelling of his wartime experiences “the best speech I have heard yet.”⁴⁸

Angelo was careful not to appear as though he was asking for anything he didn’t deserve. The men he represented, Angelo assured the committee, didn’t go to war “for money; we went in there for our country; for our flag; and we fought for it; we slept in the mud; we ate when we got it; and when we didn’t get it, we didn’t kick.” He explained that enlisting meant leaving a job at the DuPont Powder Works making \$1.25 an hour, working as many hours as he wanted, for one

⁴⁷ Joseph T. Angelo’s testimony before the House Ways and Means Committee, 4 February 1931, in *Payment of Soldiers’ Adjusted Compensation Certificates*, 382–383.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 385.

that paid only a dollar a day, and that he was “proud” to have done it. However, Angelo also compared himself to those who did not serve, like his brothers-in-law who “were making big money” and able to afford their homes. He expressed disappointment that he and many other veterans “have not had a square deal.” Angelo ended his testimony with a plea, “don’t forget me for a job.”⁴⁹

The following day Angelo testified in front of the Senate Finance Committee with Patton’s wife, Beatrice, and children watching in the audience.⁵⁰ The Camden *Morning Post* commended Angelo for facing the hearings “with just as much guts” as he had demonstrated on the battlefield in France. The paper noted that his argument was simple but effective: “the nation has admitted its debt to us, so why not pay it now when it will do the most good.”⁵¹

Despite the favorable attention from the press, Angelo’s testimony and those of the other supporters of Patman’s bill did not convince enough of the committee members to move it forward for a vote. Instead, Congress turned to a proposal sponsored by Representative Isaac Bacharach, a Republican who represented New Jersey’s Second Congressional District, which included Atlantic City.⁵² The Bacharach proposal or the emergency adjusted compensation bill called on the federal government to increase the amount veterans could borrow against their certificates from the original 22.5 percent to 50 percent of the face value at 4.5 percent compounded interest. The “bonus loan” gained momentum in Congress after it was endorsed by

⁴⁹ Joseph T. Angelo’s testimony before the House Ways and Means Committee, 4 February 1931, in *Ibid*, 383–388.

⁵⁰ Dickson and Allen, *Bonus Army*, 37. See also Robert H. Patton, *The Pattons: A Personal History of an American Family* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1994), 212.

⁵¹ “Camden Vet Hikes,” 1.

⁵² The Bacharachs were originally from Philadelphia. They were one of the first Jewish families to settle in Atlantic City, New Jersey. The family became involved with the local Republican Party and invested in lumber, banking, and real estate, developing the community of Brigantine on Abescon Island. Isaac Bacharach represented New Jersey’s Second Congressional District from 1915 to 1937. He served for many years on the House Ways and Means Committee. The Duval Giants of the Negro Baseball League relocated to Atlantic City in 1916 from Jacksonville, Florida, and were renamed the Bacharach Giants in honor of Isaac’s brother Harry who was mayor at the time. For a brief biography of Isaac Bacharach see Kurt F. Stone, *The Jews of Capitol Hill: A Compendium of Jewish Congressional Members* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2011), 91–93.

the American Legion. It was viewed as a compromise measure that would not fundamentally alter the bonus policy established in 1924 but allow veterans to immediately obtain much needed cash and still retain their bonuses.⁵³

On February 26, 1931, President Hoover vetoed the emergency adjusted compensation bill despite its having passed with overwhelming support in the House and Senate. Echoing Coolidge's veto of the 1924 law, he rejected the bill with damning praise for the veterans: "The patriotism of our people is not a material thing. It is a spiritual thing. We cannot pay for it with Government aid." He concluded that the bill supported an unnecessary federal expenditure that would impede the nation's economic recovery and set a dangerous precedent of government dependence over "self-reliance and self-support."⁵⁴ Congress subsequently overrode Hoover's veto, causing him to complain that the legislation made "provisions for loans from the Treasury to people who do not need the money." However, now that it was law he pledged to "facilitate this work in every possible way."⁵⁵

Across Angelo's home state of New Jersey and the nation, local American Legion and VFW posts established committees to assist members with the loan application process. The regional director of the U.S. Veterans Bureau in New Jersey, Thomas L. McEvoy, made plans for additional personnel to keep the Newark office "open day and night to handle the rush of applications for loans."⁵⁶ On the first day, 3,300 veterans applied for loans in the Newark office

⁵³ "Millions Paid New Jersey Veterans," 2. See also Ortiz, *Beyond the Bonus March*, 40.

⁵⁴ President Herbert Hoover's veto message of the emergency adjusted compensation bill, 26 February 1931, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Herbert Hoover: Containing the Public Messages, Speeches, and Statements of the President, January 1 to December 31, 1931* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1976), 136–138.

⁵⁵ See President Herbert Hoover's News Conference on the Emergency Adjusted Compensation Act of 1931, 27 February 1931, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Herbert Hoover*, 139. See also President Herbert Hoover's Statement on the Emergency Adjusted Compensation Act of 1931, 27 February 1931, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Herbert Hoover*, 140.

⁵⁶ "700 Veterans Seek Bonus Loans Here: Bureau Expects 2,500 a Day of the 400,000 in the State and Provides for Rush," *New York Times*, 28 February 1931, 5.

of which 60 percent were “in urgent need,” and all but 100 had previously obtained loans on their certificates.⁵⁷ By January 1932, 2.5 million veterans nationwide had borrowed the full 50 percent. Despite the widespread popularity of the bonus loans, this compromise did not satisfy Representative Patman and the many others, including Joseph T. Angelo, who had supported immediate cash payment.

During the early months of 1932, the bonus continued to be a topic of much discussion on Capitol Hill and among veterans’ groups. Patman reintroduced his bill calling for the full and immediate cash payment of the bonus. Representative Wolverton supported the bill, arguing that the veterans who had borrowed against their certificates faced a compounded interest rate that would eventually erode any additional value.⁵⁸ Just as Angelo had argued to the Ways and Means Committee, Wolverton contrasted the “great wealth that came to those who did not enter the service” against the plight of veterans whose homes were being foreclosed and whose families faced “hunger and destitution.” He repeated the populist arguments made by Patman and others, emphasizing that the corporations that supplied the munitions for the military were paid all adjustments due them in a timely manner, while the men who did the actual fighting were told they had to wait to receive the money that they were owed. The situation was characterized as both fundamentally unfair and un-American. The veterans, Wolverton insisted, should “be treated the same as everyone else has been treated” by their government. He framed his argument very carefully, insisting that the bill did not reward veterans’ patriotism, as its critics claimed, but instead corrected an inequality of opportunity between those who served and those who

⁵⁷ “15,000 Apply Here for Loans on Bonus: \$4,500,000 Estimated as Total asked by Veterans on First Day of New Law . . . 3,300 Seek Loans in Newark: 60% of Applications Said to be in Need – 24-hour Work Planned,” *New York Times*, 1 March 1931, 28.

⁵⁸ “How Wolverton Fought for Bonus Bill,” *Courier-Post* (Camden, NJ), 18 June 1932, 8.

benefitted from wartime wage gains and profits.⁵⁹ But many members of Congress and President Hoover remained opposed, arguing that the bonus would place a severe strain on the federal budget at a time when the nation was trying to find its way out of the economic crisis.

Meanwhile, veterans across the country made plans to march on Washington, DC. The idea for a march began with Walter W. Waters of Portland, Oregon, who had served in the 1916 “Punitive Expedition” into Mexico and with the AEF in France. After the war, he found a job in a cannery near Portland but, one year after the stock market crash, he was laid off. On March 15, 1932, unable to find work and nearly destitute, Waters attended a veterans’ meeting in Portland where he urged the attendees to descend on Washington, DC, to demand what they believed was right and fair: full cash payment of their bonuses. Several hundred veterans from Portland calling themselves the Bonus Expeditionary Force (BEF) or the Bonus Army joined Waters on the 3,000-mile journey to Washington.⁶⁰ This modest protest eventually grew into a mass demonstration by the spring of 1932 as an estimated 20,000 veterans, black and white, arrived in Washington, many of them with their families.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ For biographical information about Walter W. Waters see Walter W. Waters, *B.E.F.: The Whole Story of the Bonus Army as told to William C. White* (New York: John Day Company, Inc., 1933). See also Dickson and Allen, *Bonus Army*, 56–62; “Walter W. Waters, Commander of the Bonus Expeditionary Force,” *Illinois Library Digital Collections*, accessed on 17 August 2021, www.digital.library.illinois.edu; and “Walter W. Waters,” *Histories of the National Mall*, accessed on 17 August 2021, <http://mallhistory.org/items/show/120>.



Veterans' journey to Washington, DC, via freight cars, June 3, 1932
Library of Congress

Joseph T. Angelo again answered the call for protest and headed to the nation's capital. On June 2, 1932, after a mass meeting at the Camden Labor Temple, Angelo, one of 500 veterans, left Camden "to join other ex-service men in a demand for the immediate payment of the soldier bonus." Once in Washington, they were met by fellow Camden resident Michael Benjamin Thomas, the New Jersey State Adjutant of the VFW, who suggested that Congress stop worrying about the gold standard and "print us some money so we can get some food for our families and pay the rent."⁶¹

As the veterans swarmed into Washington, the American Legion and the VFW "denied any official connection" to the protest. The National Commander of the VFW, Darold D. DeCoe, "sent an order to all posts prohibiting members of good standing in taking part in the marches on

⁶¹ "Bonus Army Digs in till Congress Digs Down for Bonus," *Daily News* (New York, NY), 6 June 1932, 2, 4. "500 Join Bonus March; Veterans Start from Camden to Press Demands in Washington," *New York Times*, 3 June 1932, 2. Michael Benjamin Thomas referred to himself as the "Lieutenant Commander of the Camden contingent." See "Two Veteran Groups Deny Part in 'March'; V.F.W. Forbids Members to Join Demonstration, While the Legion Ignores It," *New York Times*, 9 June 1932, 19. See also Dorwart and Mackey, *Camden County*, 254.

the capital” while the national leadership of the American Legion “adopted no official policy, taking the course of ignoring the bonus march.”⁶² House Majority Leader Henry Rainey called the Bonus March “foolish” and “futile.”⁶³ Even Patman himself grew concerned with the numbers of veterans arriving in the nation’s capital, saying, “I had no part in the coming of this bonus army to the National Capital and I will not give any encouragement to others joining this force.” But he would not “treat them discourteously . . . Men who spilled their blood on foreign soil and bear the scars of wounds received in their country’s cause must not be allowed to starve on the Capitol steps,” he told the *Evening Star* of Washington, DC.⁶⁴

Desperate veterans continued to arrive daily in the city, settling in parks and abandoned government buildings. The superintendent of the DC Police Department, Pelham D. Glassford, who had been the youngest brigadier general in the U.S. Army during World War I, arranged to house the veterans on a field on the Anacostia Flats, an area of muddy tidal lands along the Anacostia River across from the Washington Navy Yard that was prone to flooding and could only be reached from Capitol Hill by a drawbridge at 11th Street. Although Glassford provided the veterans with building materials, most made do with what they could find in nearby junk piles and local scrapyards. Tents, lean-tos, and shacks made of old lumber, packing boxes, thatched straw, and scrap tin sprang up almost overnight in makeshift encampments or “Hooverilles,” not just on the Anacostia Flats, but across the nation’s capital.⁶⁵

⁶² “Two Veteran Groups Deny Part in ‘March,’” 19. For the American Legion’s noncommittal policy see Pencak, *For God & Country*, 203.

⁶³ “Rainey Says Bonus March is Foolish; Democratic Leader Declares Hoover Would Veto any Measure Passed,” *Evening Star* (Washington, DC), 4 June 1932, A-2.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Dickson and Allen, *Bonus Army*, 94–110, 154–155.



Bonus Army encampment, Anacostia Flats, Washington, DC, 1932
Library of Congress

Angelo was recognized as one of the leaders and a key spokesperson for the Bonus Marchers from Camden. “There was Joe Angelo, leader of the group from Camden, N. J.,” said Waters, who was elected to command the Bonus Army. “Angelo came to Washington to lead the first group on to Anacostia Field.”⁶⁶ Several Camden veterans signed a letter to the editor of the Camden *Courier-Post*, crediting “Jos. Angelo, of Delair, who is the holder of the D.S.C.” for leading them to Washington.⁶⁷ Angelo and the other leaders of the Camden contingent assigned work details and enforced discipline in their encampment, which was described as “peppier and ritzier than any here.”⁶⁸

The encampments were designed as self-contained communities complete with their own newspaper, the *B.E.F. News*. Camp Marks, on the Anacostia Flats, the largest of the

⁶⁶ Waters, *B.E.F.: The Whole Story of the Bonus Army as told to William C. White*, 91–92.

⁶⁷ “Angelo Led Bonus Marchers,” *Courier-Post* (Camden, NJ), 9 June 1932, 10.

⁶⁸ “Bonus Army Digs in,” 2, 4.

encampments, was named for Captain S. J. Marks, the supportive commander of the local police precinct.⁶⁹ To live in these encampments, protestors, regardless of race, had to prove that they served in the military during the Great War and had been honorably discharged. “There I found black toes and white toes sticking out side by side from a ramshackle town of pup tents, packing crates, and tar-paper shacks,” wrote Roy Wilkins, a correspondent for the NAACP magazine *The Crisis*, who toured the camps. “For years the U.S. Army had argued that General Jim Crow was its proper commander, but the Bonus Marchers gave lie to the notion that black and white soldiers—ex-soldiers in their case—couldn’t live together.”⁷⁰ During an era when Black Americans were prohibited from certain public spaces and denied service in restaurants and other establishments in the nation’s capital, the Bonus Army encampments were integrated.⁷¹ In the camps, Wilkins observed “there was one absentee, James Crow.”⁷²

The protestors were united by their military service and their cause. Money was the issue, not race. The Bonus Marchers identified as citizens, whether black or white, who had answered their country’s call to go to war and were now financially destitute. They argued that their service entitled them to immediate payment of their bonus. Sergeant William A. Butler of DC who had served in the 369th Regiment, known as the Harlem Hellfighters, and who, like Angelo, had earned the Distinguished Service Cross and the French Croix de Guerre was among the “14 heroes of the World War” who led a march known as the twilight parade down Pennsylvania Avenue on June 7, 1932. This march highlighted the racial diversity of the Bonus Army, whose

⁶⁹ Roger Daniels, *The Bonus March: An Episode of the Great Depression* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Company, 1971), 101. Captain S. J. Marks commanded the 11th police precinct which encompassed the Anacostia section of Washington, DC.

⁷⁰ Dickson and Allen, *Bonus Army*, 118.

⁷¹ “Negro Can’t Live 24 hours in DC without Insult,” *Northwest Enterprise* (Seattle, WA), 9 June 1932, 1.

⁷² Dickson and Allen, *Bonus Army*, 118.

ranks included around 400 Black servicemen.⁷³ The veterans “cry together over thoughts of the destitute loved ones left behind . . . and their salvation in the much-hoped-for bonus payment,” wrote a correspondent for the *Northwest Enterprise*, a Black newspaper in Seattle, Washington, reminding readers “it must not be forgotten that these men . . . went over in ’17 and broke the back out of the Hindenburg line for America and Democracy.”⁷⁴

As the nation watched the events of the protest unfold, the Bonus Marchers had to counter a popular misconception in American society that poverty and homelessness denoted laziness. They had to prove that they were upstanding citizens and contributing members to society whose unemployed status and poverty were attributable to the financial crisis and not to any lack of morals or work ethic. The Bonus Marchers relied on their reputations as brave soldiers and hard-working and patriotic men to gain support for their cause. Richard Lee of the New York *Daily News* acknowledged some of the public’s uncertainty asking, “Are these bonus army guys chronic dopes who’ve never done anything since they got out of the Army, or are they genuine sufferers from unemployment?” His conclusion that there were “remarkably few dopes” was supported by the presence of “many heroes, now unemployed” among the protestors, including Joseph T. Angelo, “the proud wearer of a Distinguished Service Cross . . . who saved a wounded colonel’s life . . . in the Argonne.” Angelo’s distinction as a war hero lent the protest credibility—his record contrasted against his current circumstances epitomized why the men needed *and* deserved payment of the bonus. Angelo himself rarely passed up an opportunity to point to his military record to highlight the urgency of the situation. “If the House doesn’t vote

⁷³ Lucy G. Barber, *Marching on Washington: The Forging of an American Political Tradition* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 86–87.

⁷⁴ “Old Jim Crow is Barred from Camp of War Veterans Seeking Bonus Pay,” *Northwest Enterprise* (Seattle, WA), 23 June 1932, 1, 4.

the bonus,” he declared, “they’re going to have to erect a monument here in Anacostia Park to mark the scene where a wearer of the Distinguished Service Cross starved to death.”⁷⁵

On June 9, a petition from the Bonus Marchers titled “Demands of Our Buddies” was entered into the congressional records of both the House of Representatives and the Senate. The veterans noted their service on “the blood-soaked battlefields of France” and the “promises solemnly given” to provide them with the soldiers’ compensation certificates. Given the current economic conditions, they demanded “immediate payment in cash of the unpaid balance of the adjusted-compensation certificates” or “jobs for the jobless veterans and the other jobless of the Nation.” Senator John William Elmer Thomas, a Democrat from Oklahoma, presented the veterans’ petition as the Senate debated an Army appropriations bill, seeking to draw attention to the plight of the “ex-army” camped nearby. Urging Congress to take action, he noted “many people in this country can not [sic] understand why it is that this Government . . . can make it so easy for the railroads and the banks and the life insurance companies to come to Washington and, for the mere asking, receive money by the millions . . . but when these ex-soldiers come here” they were told that they were not welcome. Thomas proceeded to enter into the record a number of articles highlighting the conditions of the Bonus Army encampments and the wartime service of the veterans. For his first example, Thomas held up a photo of a young man wearing the Distinguished Service Cross, Joseph T. Angelo.⁷⁶

The Bonus Marchers, Thomas argued, “are American citizens and entitled to all the rights and privileges as such.” He emphasized that they were not only citizens, voters, and working

⁷⁵ “Bonus Army Digs in,” 2, 4. Bonus Army leaders also established guidelines that the veterans had to strictly follow or face proper discipline. These guidelines were necessary to curb any misdeeds that could damage their reputation and undermine the protest’s legitimacy.

⁷⁶ *Congressional Record: Proceedings and Debates of the First Session of the Seventy-second Congress of the United States* vol. 75, part 11 (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1932), 12436–12440.

men, but also heroes who could lay claim to the right to be heard based on their service.⁷⁷ Like so many others, these men had been rendered jobless and homeless, their families subject to starvation; yet their circumstances spoke to more than just the effects of the Great Depression—they spoke to a sense of national pride. Thomas entered an editorial from the *Washington Times* into the record which described how Angelo, who was once “spick and span . . . when he went to the war at his country’s request,” now wore clothes old and worn along with his two medals, “souvenirs presented to him by a generous Government.” But as Angelo was forced to admit, these medals “don’t get my family any food.”⁷⁸

In the encampments, circumstances were precarious. The Bonus Marchers faced a “serious food shortage shortly after their arrival,” but the VFW provided \$500, and soon donations of food, clothing, and other supplies came from supporters nationwide.⁷⁹ On June 3, Glassford arranged a benefit performance, in which the veterans participated, at the Gayety Burlesque Theater on Ninth Street, earning \$540 for the cause. Boxing and wrestling exhibitions held on June 8 at Griffith Stadium, a baseball park nearby, raised more than \$2,500 in voluntary donations.⁸⁰ Creativity certainly helped; Joseph T. Angelo participated in a stunt to earn some extra money that didn’t disappoint. During the hot DC summer, outside of the entrance to Camp Marks, he was buried alive. “Three stovepipes run down about five feet to his resting place,” one newspaper reported. “A comrade sits above him, coaxing customers, with a megaphone. Drop something in the box and Tony will snap on his flashlight. Then you can look down a stovepipe

⁷⁷ Ibid, 12436.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 12440. The *Washington Times* editorial entered into the record was dated 8 June 1932.

⁷⁹ “Two Veteran Groups Deny Part in ‘March,’” 19. See also “Bonus Marchers Face Ouster as Food Dwindles,” *Quad-City Times* (Davenport, IA), 5 June 1932, 2.

⁸⁰ “Cabinet Confers over Bonus Army,” *Sun* (Baltimore, MD), 4 June 1932, 2. See also *Congressional Record*, 12436.

and see him lying on his blanket.” Ever the showman, Angelo proclaimed: “Tell the world that a D.S.C. man is lying below ground to make money to pay taxes on a home above ground.”⁸¹

The presence of decorated ex-servicemen like Angelo and the use of symbols like the American flag and the singing of patriotic songs helped protest organizers portray the Bonus Marchers as worthy veterans and upstanding citizens to counter a popular narrative that had gained traction nationwide linking them to a communist agenda to overthrow the government. The press sensationalized the story, focusing on a small communist faction affiliated with the Workers Ex-Service Men’s League. The perceived threat of communism on American institutions had precipitated a robust response from the government in the Red Scare of 1919–1920. The conditions of the Great Depression spurred rhetoric related to class warfare and to the failure of capitalism, while the visibility of communist organizations in American society further deepened these fears.⁸²

Well aware that an association with communism could undermine their cause, Bonus Army leaders distanced themselves from radical ideology and tried to “keep all communists from joining with them.” While critical of corporate profits during the war, the veterans rejected the economic reforms of the communists and appealed to American ideas of fairness and equality of opportunity.⁸³ In his memoirs, Walter W. Waters explained that he and the other Bonus Army leaders had to contend with persistent rumors perpetuated by the government and the press that “the whole B.E.F. was Red.” His “chief problem with the Communists,” Waters declared, “was

⁸¹ “Transport Bill Cuts into Ranks of B.E.F.,” *Times-Tribune* (Scranton, PA), 11 July 1932, 22.

⁸² “Hunger Marchers Acclaimed Here: Fifteen Truckloads, Back from Capital, Are Comrades’ Guests at a Victory Dinner,” *New York Times*, 10 December 1931, 7; “Map Plans for Marchers: Red Leaders Here Denying Plot, Prepare Petitions for Congress,” *New York Times*, 2 December 1931, 16. In December 1931, the Communist-organized Unemployed Councils led the first National Hunger March on Washington, DC, demanding full-wage unemployment insurance and greater taxation on capital and profits. See also Roy Rosenzweig, “Organizing the Unemployed: The Early Years of the Great Depression, 1929–1933” in *Workers’ Struggles, Past and Present: A “Radical America” Reader* ed. James Green (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), 172.

⁸³ “Bonus March Draws Attack from Solons; Police May Demand Evacuation by Monday,” *Brownsville Herald* (Brownsville, TX), 5 June 1932, 1.

to prevent the men of the B.E.F., literally, from almost killing any Communist they found among them.”⁸⁴

On Monday, June 13, 1932, bonus protestors trudged through pouring rain from their flooded encampments to the Capitol building to listen to debates in the House before a test vote on the Patman Bill was conducted later that day. In a vote of 226 to 175, the House agreed to make the Patman Bill the first order of business on Tuesday.⁸⁵ But the vote on the bill had to be delayed after Representative Edward E. Eslick, a Tennessee Democrat, suffered a fatal heart attack while passionately urging the House to support the bonus.⁸⁶ On June 15, members of the Bonus Army paid their respects as Eslick’s casket, borne by “six medal men,” including Joseph T. Angelo, was placed in a hearse bound for Union Station. There it was put on a train back to his home state for burial.⁸⁷



**Veterans honor Representative Edward E. Eslick who died making bonus plea before House, June 15, 1932
Library of Congress**

⁸⁴ Waters, *B.E.F.: The Whole Story of the Bonus Army*, 73.

⁸⁵ “Bonus Forces Win in House Test Ballot; Consideration of Bill is Voted, 226-175: Showdown Tuesday,” *Indianapolis Times* (Indianapolis, IN), 13 June 1932, 1.

⁸⁶ “Eslick Dies in House Pleading for Bonus; Tennessee Democrat Stricken by Heart Disease in Midst of Impassioned Speech,” *New York Times*, 15 June 1932, 1.

⁸⁷ “Last Tribute Paid Eslick by B.E.F.,” *Evening Star* (Washington, DC), 16 June 1932, 16.

Following Eslick's death, and as the House took up the Patman Bill, several hundred Bonus Marchers, some with family members in tow "sat in the . . . gallery . . . and watched tensely as the vote was being taken." At the end of day, the Patman Bill passed by a vote of 209 to 176, leading to wild cheers from the veterans who "rushed out of the chamber to spread the tidings among their comrades." But the news of the House vote was received "calmly" by most of the Bonus Marchers. "By now they had realized that the House success was assured, and that they faced what appeared to be certain defeat in the Senate," one report indicated.⁸⁸

On June 17, over ten thousand Bonus Marchers "laid siege to the Capitol, jamming the Senate galleries and corridors and massing on the plaza," as the Senate debated the Patman Bill. After seven hours, the senators, voicing concern about running a federal deficit, rejected the bill by a vote of 62 to 18. The veterans had anticipated defeat in the Senate, but the lopsided vote stunned many of them. On the steps of the Capitol, Waters delivered the news to the veterans waiting outside. "The bonus has been defeated," he announced, urging restraint and adding "this is only a temporary setback . . . we are going to stay here until we change the minds of these guys. You're ten times better Americans than the senators who voted against the bill."⁸⁹

After the bill's defeat, many "wearied" Bonus Marchers gathered their belongings and prepared to return home.⁹⁰ But even with this stinging setback, thousands stayed in the nation's capital. They refused to accept the Senate's vote as the final word on the matter and criticized Waters for using the protest to gain a national profile rather than achieving results for the veterans. Joseph T. Angelo also remained in the city and became one of Waters' most vocal

⁸⁸ "Bonus Bill Passes in House, 209-176; Senate to Rush Vote," *New York Times*, 16 June 1932, 1.

⁸⁹ Jerome Tuccille, *The War Against the Vets: The World War I Bonus Army during the Great Depression* (Lincoln, NE: Potomac Books, 2018), 81.

⁹⁰ "The Week in America: Hoover Renominated: Curtis is also Named; Resubmission Plank of Republicans Satisfies the President; Democrats Again Active; Roosevelt Forces Say They Lack only 15 Votes for a Majority; Senate Kills Bonus Bill; Relief and Economy Measures still in Tangle, with No Adjournment in Site," *New York Times*, 19 June 1932, E-7.

critics. “Waters swore to us when we made him boss,” Angelo declared, “that we would all stay here until 1945 if we did not get our bonus.”⁹¹

As the days turned into weeks, government officials feared that the bitterness felt by the remaining veterans over the defeat of the Patman Bill compounded by deteriorating conditions in the encampments would lead to widespread violence. Those fears deepened when, on July 16, roughly 6,500 “angry veterans threatened to run riot through the Capitol in protest against the adjournment of Congress without action on their demand.” Expecting more demonstrations, the DC police “maintained one of the heaviest guards in years at the White House,” reported the *New York Times*.⁹² Of particular concern were nearly 1,500 Bonus Marchers who had encamped in several abandoned Treasury Department buildings and vacant lots between Pennsylvania and Missouri Avenues near the Capitol. This encampment was named Camp Glassford for the DC police superintendent who had been sympathetic to the veterans. Now Glassford had been ordered by the City Board of Commissioners, on the authority of the Treasury Department, to make sure that “the downtown area . . . [was] clear of all bonus marchers by midnight” on July 28.⁹³

⁹¹ Tuccille, *War Against the Vets*, 82. See also Daniels, *Bonus March*, 127.

⁹² “Bonus Army Digs In; ‘To Stay Until 1945;’ Waters tells Veterans they must obey Law as they remain Quietly in Quarters,” *New York Times*, 18 July 1932, 1.

⁹³ “Washington Orders B.E.F. to Evacuate; Board Tells Gen. Glassford to give Veterans until Aug. 4 to Quit Sites they Occupy; Leaders Predict Danger; Say few of the Men will Leave Voluntarily – Police Report More than 11,000 Remain,” *New York Times*, 22 July 1932, 1. See also “Bonus Troops told to Move by Glassford; Veterans advised to Get Going by Capital’s Police Chief,” *Indianapolis Times* (Indianapolis, IN), 21 July 1932, 7.



**BEF encampment near an abandoned Treasury Department Building in Washington, DC, 1932
Library of Congress**

Adding to the fears of violence that swirled throughout the city were the persistent rumors that communists had infiltrated the Bonus Marchers. While the Bonus Army leaders maintained that suspected communists were an ineffectual minority, government and media reports continued to focus on the communist influence among the protestors, raising public suspicion of the motives of the remaining veterans. The U.S. Army Chief of Staff, General Douglas MacArthur, was convinced that the goals of the movement were “actually far deeper and more dangerous than an effort to secure funds from a nearly depleted federal treasury.”⁹⁴ At 10 a.m. on July 28, 1932, several DC police officers and Treasury agents successfully evicted veterans encamped in one of the abandoned Treasury Department buildings, a former national guard armory. Police cordoned off the area as more Bonus Marchers converged on the scene, rushing the police lines and throwing bricks from a nearby pile at the officers. Glassford warned

⁹⁴ Douglas MacArthur, *Reminiscences* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 92–93.

the Bonus Army leaders that “the situation was becoming increasingly serious and that police could not be expected to indefinitely restrain themselves.”⁹⁵



Bonus Marchers clash with DC police, 1932
National Archives

Police were then sent to break up a fight between groups of Bonus Marchers who were encamped in one of the other abandoned Treasury Department buildings at 1:45 p.m. Shots fired during the ensuing fracas left three officers injured, one veteran dead, and another mortally wounded. This latest confrontation between the police and protestors led President Hoover to direct General MacArthur to deploy army units from nearby bases in Virginia to support the local police in evicting the veterans from the buildings. MacArthur’s troops were to drive the veterans from the downtown area across the Anacostia drawbridge to Camp Marks, but they were not to pursue them across the bridge.

At 4:30 p.m., MacArthur ordered the troops to support the police in clearing the downtown area of veterans. Nearly 200 mounted cavalry troops, led by their commanding officer

⁹⁵ “Hundreds Hurl Bricks at Cops in Pitched Battle as Bonus ‘Army’ Evictions Are Begun,” *Indianapolis Times* (Indianapolis, IN), 28 July 1932, 1.

Major George S. Patton Jr., the man Joseph T. Angelo had saved in the Argonne, rode out of the Ellipse, the grassy lawn across from the White House, with their sabers drawn. Patton, like MacArthur, believed that the veterans were “revolutionists” and described the Bonus Army as a “disgrace.”⁹⁶ They were followed by 5 tanks and roughly 300 to 400 infantrymen wearing gas masks and carrying loaded rifles with fixed bayonets. The cavalry and tanks chased the Bonus Marchers, including many wives and children, down Pennsylvania Avenue as the infantry tossed tear gas grenades at the fleeing crowds.⁹⁷ The makeshift encampment that the veterans had constructed near the abandoned Treasury Department buildings was torched by soldiers with flamethrowers. Clouds of thick black smoke billowing from the burning shanties mingled with tear gas making it difficult to breathe. After two hours, the troops had driven 2,000 Bonus Marchers from the downtown area across the drawbridge to Camp Marks on the Anacostia Flats.⁹⁸

Ignoring President Hoover, MacArthur directed his men to cross the drawbridge to evict the veterans from Camp Marks. The troops “surrounded the main camp of the Bonus Expeditionary Force at Anacostia, wheeled their tanks into position, unlimbered their gas bombs and gave the thousands of veterans massed there thirty minutes in which to evacuate,” the *New York Times* reported. The veterans, who were shocked at the sight of U.S. soldiers going “into action against them,” had already begun to evacuate their families from the encampment and “prepared to leave themselves.” Some, angry at the callous and contemptuous way that the government they had dutifully served was treating them, set fire to the shanties that had been their homes for the past two months. “The glow from the burning structures” could be seen for

⁹⁶ Benjamin Runkle, *Generals in the Making: How Marshall, Eisenhower, Patton, and their Peers Became the Commanders who Won World War II* (Lanham, MD: Stackpole Books, 2019), 192.

⁹⁷ “Hoover Orders Eviction: Blaming Reds, He Asserts Bonus Camps Included Many Criminals,” *New York Times*, 29 July 1932, 1.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

miles, and “served to attract thousands of spectators.”⁹⁹ In the aftermath of the eviction, 2 veterans were dead, an 11-month-old child lost its life due to a gas-related illness, an 8-year-old boy was partially blinded by tear gas, 2 police officers suffered skull fractures, and thousands of Bonus Marchers endured gas-related injuries.¹⁰⁰

General MacArthur held a press conference in which he declared “the situation presented had been of the most serious character and that President Hoover had delayed to the last possible moment before ordering strong action.”¹⁰¹ The general had been eager to confront the Bonus Army, and for the past several weeks had his troops engaged in counter-riot training at Fort Myer.¹⁰² He praised the “smoothness” of the military operation and justified it as necessary, claiming that many of the Bonus Marchers were not “real war veterans,” but “insurrectionists” who were determined to “take over the government in some arbitrary way or control it by some indirect method.” MacArthur was certain that “the government was in peril” and that the president had to act or “he would have been derelict in his duty.”¹⁰³ Hoover, who was in the middle of a re-election campaign, explained the actions against the Bonus Marchers as necessary to prevent further clashes between the veterans and local police. “Government cannot be coerced by mob rule,” he declared. The order to call out the troops had been made “in keeping with the first obligation of my office,” upholding the U.S. Constitution and “the authority of the law.”¹⁰⁴ Hoover challenged the patriotism and legitimacy of the protestors explaining “that many of the

⁹⁹ “Anacostia Camp No More: Troops Move into Last Bonus Army Refuge as Flames Start and Finish Destruction; Marchers Stream away, Some in broken-down Autos, Some Trudging Afoot,” *New York Times*, 29 July 1932, 1, 3.

¹⁰⁰ Irving Bernstein, *The Lean Years: A History of the American Worker, 1920–1933* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960), 453; and Dickson and Allen, *Bonus Army*, 166, 169, 175, 182–183. For a comprehensive description of the eviction of the Bonus Army see Donald J. Lisio, *The President and Protest: Hoover, MacArthur, and the Bonus Riot* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1994), 139–225.

¹⁰¹ “M’Arthur Declares Hoover had to Act; Another Week’s Delay might have Imperiled Government, General Declares,” *New York Times*, 29 July 1932, 3.

¹⁰² Runkle, *Generals in the Making*, 192.

¹⁰³ “M’Arthur Declares Hoover had to Act,” 3. See also Runkle, *Generals in the Making*, 192.

¹⁰⁴ “Camps Now Charred Ruins: Unkempt and Hungry Veterans take Roads to Johnstown, Pa,” *New York Times*, 30 July 1932, 1.

bonus seekers who had stayed on after Congress had adjourned, were not veterans” but “Communists and persons with criminal records.”¹⁰⁵

Support for the Bonus Army came from newspaper editors and political leaders across the country and even from some of the military brass. “What a pitiful spectacle,” observed the Republican *Washington Daily News* on July 30: “The mightiest government in the world chasing unarmed men, women and children with Army tanks. If the Army must be called out to make war on unarmed citizens, this is no longer America.”¹⁰⁶ Representative Patman denounced Hoover for his handling of the Bonus Army and suggested that the president should instead “use the army to drive the international banking lobby from the capital city.”¹⁰⁷ Patman’s colleague and fellow World War I veteran, Fiorello La Guardia, the Republican representative from New York, chastised the president: “Soup is cheaper than tear bombs and bread better than bullets in maintaining law and order in these times of depression, unemployment, and hunger.” He asked, “Did it occur to any one in Washington that these same men might have been employed to demolish the buildings they were ordered to evacuate?”¹⁰⁸ Major Dwight D. Eisenhower, MacArthur’s principal aide, dismissed him as a “damn fool” and “dumb son of a bitch” for his use of aggressive tactics to evict the veterans from Camp Marks.¹⁰⁹ New York’s governor and Democratic Party nominee for president Franklin D. Roosevelt, who opposed paying the bonus

¹⁰⁵ “Hoover Orders Eviction,” 1. On July 29, 1932, DC police conducting sweeps of the areas around the former encampments raided a meeting at an abandoned church where they arrested 36 “alleged radicals.” Among them were a number of Black men, including James W. Ford, the Communist Party’s candidate for vice-president. Emanuel Levin who led the Workers Ex-Service Men’s League was also among those who were arrested. See “Camps Now Charred Ruins,” 1. See also “36 Are Arrested as Radicals at the Capital, Including the Red Vice Presidential Nominee,” *New York Times*, 30 July 1932, 1; and “Reds Accept Blame for Bonus Rioting: Communist Party Here Declares It Also Plans New March on Capital Next December,” *New York Times*, 31 July 1932, 1.

¹⁰⁶ Jean Edward Smith, *FDR* (New York: Random House, 2007), 284.

¹⁰⁷ “Patman Assails Hoover: Says Army Should Be Used Against International Banking Lobby,” *New York Times*, 30 July 1932, 4.

¹⁰⁸ “La Guardia Assails Veterans’ Eviction: He wires Hoover that Soup is Better than Tear Bombs, Bread cheaper than Bullets,” *New York Times*, 30 July 1932, 6.

¹⁰⁹ Dickson and Allen, *Bonus Army*, 115; and Stanley Weintraub, *15 Stars: Eisenhower, MacArthur, Marshall: Three Generals who Saved the American Century* (New York: The Free Press, 2007), 82.

but shared the indignation that many Americans felt toward the treatment of the veterans, remarked to an associate: “Well, this will elect me.”¹¹⁰

Among the smoldering remnants of Camp Marks, Joseph T. Angelo, dazed and suffering from smoke inhalation, came upon a sergeant from the 12th Infantry Regiment and asked to speak with the man whose life he had saved during the Great War, Major George S. Patton Jr. The sergeant led Angelo to an area where Patton and several other officers were drinking coffee. The sergeant informed Patton that he was with one of the Bonus Marchers who claimed to know him. When Angelo came forward, Patton stared at the slender veteran and declared: “Sergeant, I do not know this man, take him away, and under no circumstances permit him to return!” After the sergeant led a stunned Angelo away, Patton admitted that he had lied about not knowing him, concerned with the optics of the situation. He attempted to explain to the others that Angelo “was my orderly during the war. When I was wounded, he dragged me into a shell hole under fire. I got him a decoration for it. Since the war, my mother and I have more than supported him . . . Can you imagine the headlines if the papers got wind of our meeting here this morning!”¹¹¹

The papers, however, *did* find out about their meeting. In an article reprinted nationwide, the *New York Times* reported, “A Major of cavalry was compelled by duty . . . to evict from the main camp of the Bonus Expeditionary Force a man who saved his life on the field of battle fourteen years ago and who wears four military decorations. Major George O. Patton [sic] chased out of the camp Joe Angelo, who was his aide in the World War when the Major was a Colonel

¹¹⁰ H. W. Brands, *Traitor to his Class: The Privileged Life and Radical Presidency of Franklin Delano Roosevelt* (New York: Anchor Books, 2008), 259.

¹¹¹ Harvey Ferguson, *The Last Cavalryman: The Life of Lucian Truscott, Jr.* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015), 63.

in charge of light tanks.”¹¹² The *Brownsville Herald* of Brownsville, Texas, called it “one of the most dramatic sidelights of the army’s drive on the B.E.F.”¹¹³

Patton’s daughter Ruth Ellen Patton Totten later wrote that her father’s involvement in the eviction of the Bonus Marchers was “terribly upsetting” to him, particularly because “Joe Angelo, the man who had saved his life in the first war, was among the marchers.” Angelo was admitted to Walter Reed Hospital in Bethesda, Maryland, and “we were taken to see him,” Ruth recalled. She described Angelo as “a sad little man.”¹¹⁴ After his release from the hospital, Angelo “trekked back home to Camden alone” to continue to deal with the effects of the Great Depression.¹¹⁵

The sight of destitute veterans and their families being forcibly removed from the nation’s capital did not endear voters to Hoover who was already facing a public backlash due to his feeble handling of the economic crisis. Hoover lost the 1932 presidential election in a landslide victory for Franklin D. Roosevelt. When many of the veterans returned to Washington a year later to again lobby for the bonus, President Roosevelt ordered tents, latrines, showers, and mess halls set up for them at nearby Fort Hunt in Virginia and made sure they received medical and dental treatment. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt paid a friendly visit to the veterans at Fort Hunt reportedly prompting one of the men to remark: “Hoover sent the Army, Roosevelt sent his wife.”¹¹⁶ The president signed an executive order allowing veterans to join the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and under the auspices of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), several “Veterans Rehabilitation Camps” were established, mainly in

¹¹² “Cavalry Major Evicts Veteran Who Saved his Life in Battle,” *New York Times*, 30 July 1932, 4.

¹¹³ “Major Forced to Oust Man Who Saved Life,” *Brownsville Herald* (Brownsville, TX), 29 July 1932, 1.

¹¹⁴ Totten, *The Button Box*, 233.

¹¹⁵ “World War Hero Writes Roosevelt for Help in Getting Camden Job,” *Courier-Post* (Camden, NJ), 24 April 1942, 8.

¹¹⁶ Dickson and Allen, *Bonus Army*, 215–216.

southern states where the men worked on local public improvement projects.¹¹⁷ While President Roosevelt did not support immediate payment of the bonus, his acknowledgement of the veterans' plight helped validate their struggles. The World War I veterans eventually received their bonuses in the form of U.S. Treasury bonds through the Adjusted Compensation Payment Act of 1936. Once again Congress had to override a presidential veto, this time by Roosevelt who did not want to give veterans preference over other needy Americans, to finally provide the bonus.¹¹⁸

In January 1938, Joseph T. Angelo and other veterans from southern New Jersey gathered at the Sons of Italy Hall in Camden to welcome Scott P. Squyres as incoming National Commander of the VFW and to commend Representative Wolverton for his advocacy of a bill to provide additional benefits to the widows and children of veterans. Squyres supported President Roosevelt's call for greater national defense measures as necessary for maintaining peace but cautioned that "we must take the profits out of war." He acknowledged the personal sacrifices made by the men in the audience. Reminding them of Angelo's reputation as the "bravest man in the A.E.F.," he personally assured him, "Joe, you have suffered and we love you. We are going to stick to you to the end."¹¹⁹

Angelo, however, continued to face financial hardships after his participation in the Bonus Army. Patton and his family provided him with some money over the years, including \$25 in June 1939.¹²⁰ Angelo found temporary employment with the Works Progress Administration (WPA) as a roadman on a road crew in Camden, but steady work eluded him. In

¹¹⁷ "4,000 Veterans Put in Southern Camps: But They Constitute Shifting Population and the Present Enrolment is 2,500," *New York Times*, 8 August 1935, 11.

¹¹⁸ "House Swiftly Overrides Bonus Veto by Roosevelt," *New York Times*, 25 January 1936, 1, 2.

¹¹⁹ "Speakers Applaud Franklin Roosevelt's Arms Program," *Morning Press* (Camden, NJ), 29 January 1938, 1, 16.

¹²⁰ Ferguson, *Last Cavalryman*, 63. See also Jim Sudmeier, *Patton's Madness: The Dark Side of a Battlefield Genius* (Lanham, MD: Stackpole Books, 2017), 26.

April 1942, Angelo wrote to President Roosevelt lamenting that he had been unable to get a job: “I have applications on file with the New York Shipbuilding Company for a job as pipefitter’s helper. They are hiring this type of labor now, but I don’t hear from them. They have me on the sidelines.” Angelo’s plea made the local news where he was identified as the winner of the Distinguished Service Cross and the French Croix de Guerre, a man who when he “starts out to get a job he doesn’t fool around.”¹²¹ Angelo registered for the draft that same month, but at the age of 46, he was not called to serve his country again.¹²² In 1947, after four consecutive years of failing to vote, Angelo’s name was removed from the voter registration records.¹²³

George S. Patton Jr., the man whose life Angelo had saved in the Argonne, eventually made the rank of general and cemented his reputation as a formidable military commander by leading the I Armored Corps, the II Corps, the Seventh U.S. Army, and the Third U.S. Army in campaigns across North Africa, Sicily, France, and Germany in the Second World War. Patton was killed in December 1945 in an accident involving an Army truck driven, ironically, by another Camden resident Corporal Robert L. Thompson. The Camden *Courier-Post* covered the meeting of the two men who “encompassed the career of ‘Old Blood and Guts’ Patton,” where Angelo displayed the watch he had received from Patton’s wife and publicly offered to sponsor Thompson as a member of his VFW post.¹²⁴

Despite his earlier opposition to the Bonus Bill, President Roosevelt signed the Serviceman’s Readjustment Act on June 22, 1944. The G.I. Bill, as it was more commonly

¹²¹ “World War Hero Writes Roosevelt,” 8. See also “Veteran Here Saved Life of Patton in War,” *Courier-Post* (Camden, NJ), 10 November 1942, 3.

¹²² “Indestructible Veteran,” 11; “Angelo, Joseph Thomas (1896), WWII ‘Old Man’s Draft’ Registration Cards, Records 12, 788, 446,” www.fold3.com.

¹²³ “Legal Notices,” *Courier-Post* (Camden, NJ), 21 May 1947, 22.

¹²⁴ “2 Vets Prominent in Career of Patton Meet in Camden,” *Courier-Post* (Camden, NJ), 30 July 1946, 3. Although originally a member of the Corporal Mathews-Purnell VFW Post No. 518, by 1946 Angelo had joined VFW Post No. 705 also in Camden. Patton also served with the occupation forces in Europe as military governor of Bavaria and commander of the 15th U.S. Army. In November 1945, he briefly succeeded General Dwight D. Eisenhower as commander of U.S. Army Forces in Europe when Eisenhower became Army Chief of Staff.

known, provided World War II veterans benefits that included low-interest mortgages and business loans, tuition payments, access to vocational training, and unemployment compensation. Although the Bonus Marchers had failed to achieve their intended goal, their arguments ultimately influenced some of the provisions of the G.I. Bill, which helped veterans of the Second World War to transition back to civilian life and contributed to the greatest expansion of the middle class in U.S. history. While the G.I. Bill helped many white veterans to prosper and enter the middle class during the post-war years, in an America that was still segregated, its benefits were not shared equally with all. Like many New Deal programs, the language of the G.I. Bill did not specifically exclude Black veterans from the benefits it promised, but the law was structured in a way that allowed for a wide disparity in its implementation. The G.I. Bill was administered locally, and individual states, particularly in the South, determined the distribution of its benefits, often to the detriment of Black veterans. Furthermore, redlining practices nationwide limited Black veterans' access to suburban homes and to better school districts.¹²⁵

Joseph T. Angelo continued to live with his family in the same small house he had built in Delair, a largely middle-income section of Pennsauken, New Jersey. He eventually found steady employment at the RCA Victor Company as a painter and retired in 1965. Angelo and Sara, his wife of 55 years, had two grandsons. He became an avid fisherman and on one occasion

¹²⁵ For race and the unequal implementation of the extensive benefits of the G.I. Bill see Altschuler and Blumin, "'The Most Inclusive Program': Race, Gender, and Ethnicity in Title II," chap. 5 in *The G.I. Bill*, 117-148; Michael D. Gambone, "Minority Veterans Come Home," chap. 5 in *The Greatest Generation Comes Home: The Veteran in American Society* (College Station, TX: Texas A & M University Press, 2005), 114-146. Edward Humes, "Monte Posey's War: Race and the G.I. Bill," chap. 8 in *Over Here: How the G.I. Bill Transformed the American Dream* (New York: Diversion Books, 2014), 215-254; Ortiz, *Beyond the Bonus March*, 187-206; and Matthew F. Delmont, "Homecoming," chap. 17 in *Half American: The Epic Story of African Americans Fighting World War II at Home and Abroad* (New York: Viking, 2022). See also Suzanne Mettler, *Soldiers to Citizens: The G.I. Bill and the Making of the Greatest Generation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

had to be rescued by the Coast Guard after his boat capsized. Sara once admitted that being married to Angelo was “quite exciting” but at the same time “very tiring.”¹²⁶

Over the years, Angelo, the “bravest man in the U.S. army” appeared and reappeared in human interest stories. He was invited to comment on a major biopic about Patton in 1970, appeared in a comic book set during the Second World War, and was honored by President Richard Nixon for his 76th birthday.¹²⁷ Angelo was frequently interviewed over the years, recounting his story of heroism and the perils of his past experiences while proudly displaying his medals and the watch he had received from Beatrice Patton. During an interview in 1970, Angelo expressed support for the war in Vietnam, noting America should honor its commitments.¹²⁸ He questioned the motives behind the youthful anti-war protestors of that era, unable to equate their demonstrations with his own protest, even suggesting they should be “put against the wall and shot” like traitors.¹²⁹ Angelo died in Pennsauken, New Jersey, in July 1978 at the age of 82. The headline in the Camden *Courier-Post* read simply, “He saved Patton’s life.”¹³⁰ The house Angelo had built for his family was in a state of disrepair for many years, and was eventually demolished in 2022.

The Bonus Army incident speaks directly to the American relationship between patriotism and protest. Joseph T. Angelo and many of the other Bonus Marchers defined themselves as “sincere patriots” who were devoted to upholding the “existing economic and

¹²⁶ “He Saved Patton’s Life: Joseph Angelo dies after 82 Newsworthy Years,” *Courier-Post* (Camden, NJ), 26 July 1978, 1; “Angelos Celebrate 50th Anniversary,” *Courier-Post* (Camden, NJ), 30 November 1972, 27.

¹²⁷ “Film on Patton is a Smash hit to Delair Man,” *Courier-Post* (Camden, NJ), 12 March 1970, 47. See also “Indestructible Veteran,” 11; and “Patton Arrested Man Who Saved Him,” *Philadelphia Daily News*, 21 February 1972, 6.

¹²⁸ “Film on Patton is a Smash hit to Delair Man,” 47.

¹²⁹ “Patton Arrested Man,” 6.

¹³⁰ “He Saved Patton’s Life,” 1.

political system.”¹³¹ Yet the system the Bonus Marchers defended was not the same one supported by powerful men like Hoover, Mellon, and du Pont. The veterans challenged an economic system that they believed treated them unfairly: they struggled while corporations and non-veterans had benefited from the war. The Bonus Marchers leveraged their standing as war veterans to assert their rights. They argued that their service to the nation had earned them the right to demand immediate payment of their bonuses from the government—minimal compensation given their sacrifice. It was shameful for veterans to have to struggle to pay their rent or mortgage or to endure standing on a breadline. Their service to the nation in defense of democracy, they maintained, had earned them the right to demand and to receive financial relief from the government in the form of the immediate payment of their bonuses. They looked not to economic equality to address their financial concerns, but to an America that would provide what Angelo called a “square deal” for those who had fought without question for its ideals.

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¹³¹ Mauritz A. Hallgren, “The Bonus Army Scares Mr. Hoover; President Hoover’s Slim Chance at Re-election probably ended with his heavy-handed treatment of the Unemployed Veterans who came to Washington seeking Relief,” *The Nation*, 135, 27 July 1932, 72.

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