

**Jørgen Christian Jensen**  
(1892-1960)

A Personal Memoir of My Paternal  
Grandfather

William B. Jensen

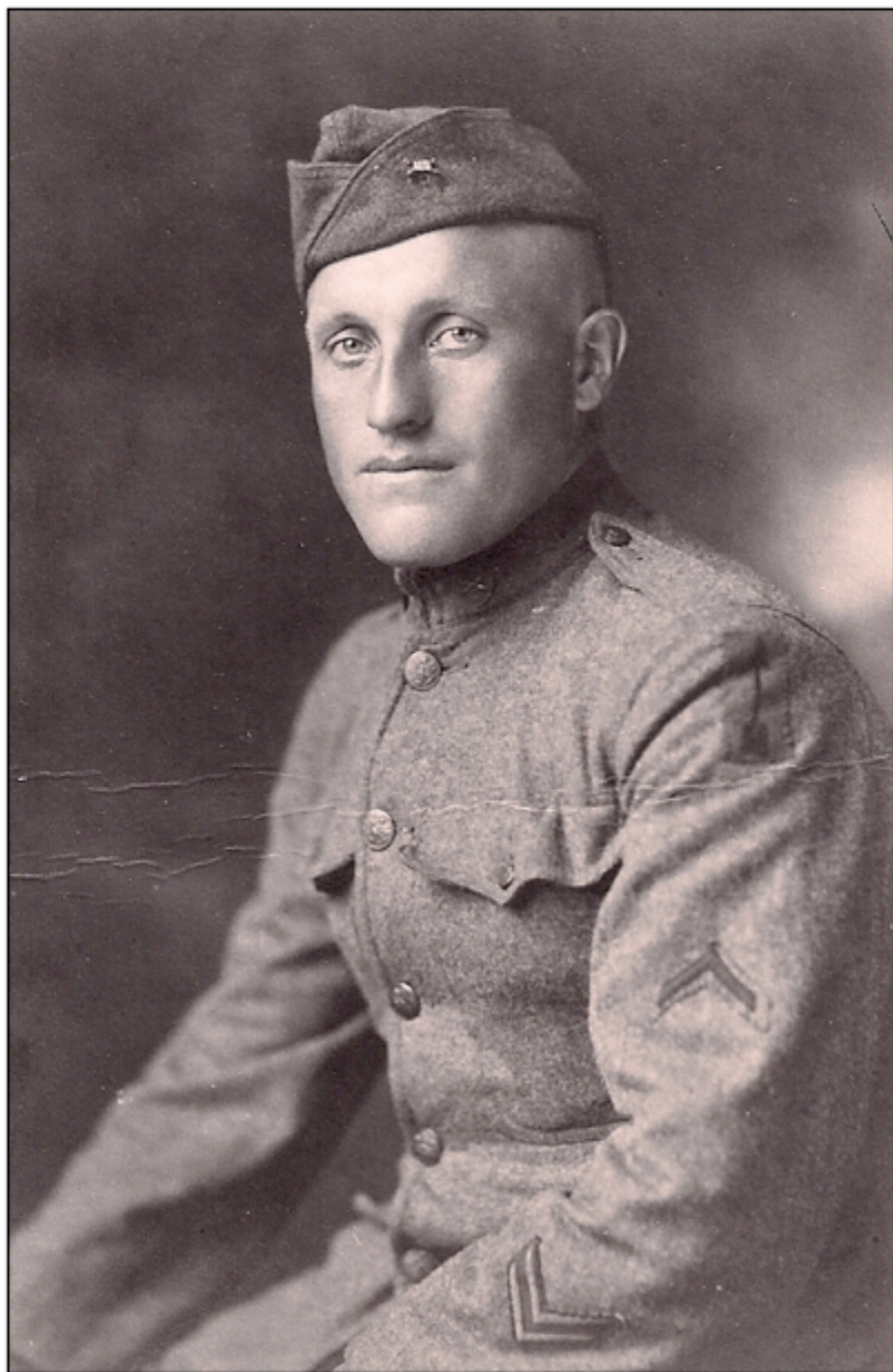


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A PERSONAL MEMOIR OF MY PATERNAL GRANDFATHER



Chris J. Jensen

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To the memory of my paternal uncle

*Harold Thomas Jensen*  
*(1921-2011)*

And his efforts to preserve family history



# I

## Birth and Immigration

My paternal grandfather, Jørgen Christian Jensen, was born on the island of Langeland (literally “long land”) – a narrow strip of land 36 miles long located just off the southeast corner of Funen or Fyn, the second largest of the many islands which form, along with the peninsula of Jutland, the country of Denmark. To scientists at least, Langeland is best known as the birthplace of the 19th-century Danish physicist, Hans Christian Oersted, the discoverer of electromagnetism, who was born in 1777 in the town of Rudkøbing along the western edge of the island.

One of the most important historical sites on the island is Tranekaer “Slot” or castle, which is located roughly 7.5 miles northeast of Rudkøbing and about 13 miles from the northern tip of the island. Though originally dating from the 13th century, the current structure looks more like an 18th- or early 19th-century manor house than like a medieval fortress and is painted bright red. Scattered along a single road to the south of the castle is a cluster of buildings which maps of the island identify as the village of Tranekaer, while to the west of the castle, and extending as far as the western coast of the island (a distance of slightly under 2 miles), is a further scattering of houses which terminates at a point on the coast known as Strandby or “Beach Village.” Despite the name, there is in fact no real village as such and the scattered houses are actually the remnants of various farms that originally belonged to the castle estates.

It was on one of these farms, known as Strandbygaard (literally “Beach Village Farm”), that my grandfather was born on 15 March 1892. Built about 1850, the original farm consisted of four wings constructed around a central farmyard with an exterior access or gateway passing through the center of the north wing. Though the three wings containing the barn, stable and cow house have long since

been torn down, the wing corresponding to the living quarters is still standing and currently bears the address of Standbyvej 7. A second cousin has visited it several times and reports that it is close enough to the western shore to have a view of the ocean and the island of Fyn beyond. It is a long, narrow (85 x 26 feet), single-story structure with a steep roof and, like the castle, is currently painted a bright red. On the beach below the house is a marker commemorating the invasion of the island by the Swedes in the 14th century. The Jensen family had moved to the farm sometime before the birth of my grandfather's older sister, Anine, in 1885 and left a few months after my grandfather's birth seven years later. The family never owned the farm on Strandbyvej, rather my grandfather's father, Morten Jensen, acted as the "bailiff" or manager of the farm for the castle. Though technically not born in Tranekaer, my grandfather was baptized in the village church and also attended the village school. Consequently, in later years he often listed Tranekaer as his birthplace on official documents.

After leaving Strandbygaard, the family moved about 7.5 miles south of Tranekaer to a house located along the eastern coast of the island in a region known as Nebbe village. Here Morten worked as a day laborer for a farmer named Malling and also supplemented his income by fishing. Like the house on Strandbyvej, the house on Nebbevej is still standing. It currently serves as a vacation home for a family from Copenhagen, who have given it the name "Naebbehuset." It is a long, single-story structure with a steep roof, a side wing, and a black and white half-timbered exterior. My cousin reports that it is actually quite large and, like Strandbygaard, also overlooks the ocean, but in the opposite direction, towards the southeast and the island of Lolland beyond. It was in this house that my grandfather lived as both a child and as a teenager.

My grandfather immigrated to the United States at age 17, settling in Marshfield, Wisconsin, a town located roughly in the

geographical center of the state and about 165 miles northwest of Milwaukee. Nicknamed “Hub City,” it owed its original existence to its importance as a centrally-located hub for the state’s railroad system, though lumbering and dairy farming soon became its principal industries. First settled in 1872, Marshfield was chartered as a city in 1883. By 1910, the year after my grandfather’s arrival, it had a population of nearly 5800, of whom roughly one sixth were foreign born.

One of the earliest photographs we have of my grandfather, taken shortly before he left Denmark, shows him at the age of 16 with a group of three school chums. He is seated in the front row of the grouping wearing a wool suit and vest and looking terribly blond and Teutonic. A straw boater is pushed rakishly back on his head and he has a cocky – all the world is my oyster – expression on his face. Immigration records show that he left Copenhagen on 26 March 1909 eleven days after his 17th birthday – and arrived in New York City on 08 April 1909 after a voyage of 14 days. After processing at Ellis Island, he then proceeded across country by train to Marshfield.

The path from the obscurity of Nebbe to the obscurity of Marshfield Wisconsin was not arbitrary, as my grandfather already had relatives living in the Marshfield area. These included his older half-brother, Carl Frederiksen, who had immigrated in 1893 at age 18, and his oldest sister, Jennie, who had immigrated in 1899 at age 17. They, in turn, had been preceded by several of their maternal aunts and uncles – their mother’s oldest sister, Marthe Frederiksen, having immigrated to Wisconsin in 1881 at age 28 and her brother, James Frederiksen, in 1887 at age 19. At some point, two other maternal uncles, Neils and Dines Frederiksen, also immigrated, but settled in Michigan rather than Wisconsin.

My grandfather’s half-brother, Carl, used his mother’s maiden name because he had been born out of wedlock while my 19-year old great grandmother, Rasmine Frederiksen, was working as a dairy maid

in Longelse. He was eight when she married Morten Jensen in 1882 and 18 when my grandfather was born in 1892, the youngest of the five Jensen children. My grandfather was barely a year old when Carl left to seek his fortune in the United States. Rasmine and Morten were married in January and their first child, Jennie, was born in May, suggesting that my great grandfather, unlike Carl's unknown biological father, was willing to own up to the consequences of his actions. It should be noted that these circumstances were not unusual for late 19th- and early 20th-century Denmark. The 1910 edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* reported a 20% illegitimacy rate for Copenhagen alone. Indeed, my great grandmother was merely emulating her own mother, Anne Kirstine Madsen, who at age 22 had given birth to her first child, Marthe Christine, in November of 1853, nearly eight months before her marriage to Frederik Nielsen in July of 1854.

The Danes never formed a major immigrant group. It is estimated that by the end of the first decade of the 20th century, when the tide of emigration from Northern Europe largely ceased, only about 300,000 had come to the United States, most of them settling in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois, Iowa and Nebraska. In comparison, more than 800,000 Norwegians and 1,200,000 Swedes had immigrated during the same time period, and even these numbers pale in comparison to the figures for the Germans, Irish, Italians, and the Eastern Europeans who followed. Most 19th-century Scandinavian emigration was driven by a drastic decrease in child mortality early in the century. This, in turn, led to overpopulation and unemployment, especially in rural areas where the land to population requirements were the highest and least flexible due to the continued practice of primogeniture. Thus the population of Denmark increased from about 900,000 in 1800 to over 2,800,000 in 1914, or more than three-fold.

The economy of Denmark remained primarily agricultural for most of the 19th century. With the exception of the landed estates of

the aristocracy, virtually all of its cultivatable land had long since been divided into small independent farms, which could only support between 10 and 15 cows. Any further subdivision was impossible without the farms falling below the subsistence level. This was one of the primary motives behind the continued practice of primogeniture. It automatically meant that younger sons, like my grandfather, were faced with basically three alternatives: remaining at home to work at subsistence wages for a wealthy landowner, moving to the city – where life in the burgeoning industrial slums was even more hopeless – or immigrating to the United States. The poorer the rural district, the worse the problem and the more drastic the solution. Thus my grandfather's home island of Langeland, which is quite sandy and not well adapted to agriculture, would lose more than 20% of its population to emigration between 1870 and 1900. Of course, since there is no evidence that the family ever owned land, primogeniture probably played little or no part in my grandfather's departure. Though his oldest brother, Alfred, remained in Denmark, this appears to have been due more to simple inertia than to the advantages of an ensured inheritance.

Significant Danish immigration to Wisconsin began in the 1850s, stimulated in part by the pamphlets and handbooks written by Laurits Friberg, a Danish-American lawyer living in Waukesha, and by Rasmus Sørensen, a Danish teacher and lay preacher, whose son had immigrated to Nashotah Wisconsin in 1844. News of the American Civil War led to a decline in immigration in the early 1860s, followed by another surge at the end of the decade, followed again by a decline brought on by the depression of 1873, and by a huge surge in the 1880s, which crested in 1882, when over 11,000 Danes left their homeland, including my great grandmother's sister, Marthe. Another peak occurred in the early 1890s, when my grandfather's half-brother Carl emigrated, and the final surge came in the first decade of the 20th century when my grandfather left.

After 1870 the most common route was to take passage across the North Sea from Copenhagen to England on a British ship, dock at either Hull or Newcastle, travel by rail across northern England to Liverpool, and there board a transatlantic liner for New York City. Later in the 19th century, the Danish Thingvalla Line began direct transatlantic operations from Copenhagen to New York. Both Carl and Jennie appear to have taken the first of these routes, as their immigration records list their passage as “indirect” rather than giving the name of a specific ship. My grandfather, however, took the direct route aboard a ship known as the *SS Oscar II*. Built in Scotland for the Scandinavian American Line of Denmark, *Oscar II* was first commissioned in 1901, and so had been in operation for only eight years when my grandfather took passage. Built of steel, the ship had two full decks, an awning deck, electric lights, and refrigeration, and could accommodate 150 first-class, 140 second-class, and 900 third-class passengers. Records indicate that my grandfather boarded in Copenhagen, after which the ship made a stop at Christiania (Oslo) Norway before beginning the transatlantic crossing to New York. The ship’s manifest indicates that virtually all of the 1190 passengers aboard were Danish emigrants en route to the United States.

Family tradition has it that my grandfather arrived in Marshfield late in the evening and, being unable to speak English or to locate his relatives, was lucky enough to be befriended by a Danish-speaking policeman by the name of Louis Thompson, who allowed him to spend the night in the Marshfield jail so that he could save the cost of a hotel room. He was collected the next morning by his sister Jennie, who lived on a farm outside of town. We know the policeman’s name because he was the uncle of my grandfather’s future wife, Marie Thompson. The helping hand that Thompson extended to my grandfather certainly seems in keeping with what little is known about his personality. A bachelor his entire life, Thompson had joined the Marshfield police force in 1905, four years before my grandfather’s

arrival and, by the time of his death in 1934, was its longest-serving member. Though he was appointed assistant chief of police in 1933, he spent most of his career walking a beat. One of his duties in later years was to direct traffic in front of Washington School on lower Central Avenue, where he soon became a favorite of the local children, who always called him “Louie” rather than Officer Thompson. The Marshfield newspaper reported that, during his final hospitalization, every school child in the city donated a penny in order to buy flowers for his room.

We have a second photograph of my grandfather taken shortly after his arrival in Marshfield and sent back to his family in Langeland. This shows him standing behind a chair. He is dressed in a plaid suit, vest, and felt hat. His right hand is holding on to the back of the chair, the rather formless felt hat lacks the nonchalant placement of the straw boater in the earlier photograph, and all traces of the cocky facial expression are gone. We know that this photograph was sent back to Denmark to testify to his safe arrival because we also possess a large photograph taken about 1920 of his mother and older brother Alfred sitting around the dining room table in Nebbe. Alfred is seated to the left reading a newspaper with the title *Politiken* and Rasmine is seated to the right. Both the wall behind them and the table in front of them are literally covered with family portraits, all of which are clearly visible, and with two large framed lithographs of the king and queen of Denmark. On the wall, below and to the right of the framed lithograph of the king, is the photograph of my grandfather clutching the chair, identical to the copy I am looking at now and which resided for decades in the bottom drawer of the dining room sideboard in my grandparent’s home in Marshfield.

About two dozen postcards addressed to my grandfather have survived from the period 1909-1914. Many of these are from friends and family in Denmark. Others, written in both English and Danish, are apparently from fellow immigrants whom he met during his trip

from Langeland to Marshfield. They bear postal stamps from Chicago, Utah, Ohio, and various cities in Wisconsin. In some cases, they inquire whether my grandfather had succeeded in finding a job. The 1910 census testifies that he did, since it lists him working as a farm laborer or “hiredman” for one Peter R. Ebbe, who apparently also served as his sponsor. All of the postcards, from May of 1909 until May of 1911, were sent to a rural address near Marshfield – almost certainly that of Peter Ebbe.

Near the end of 1911, the postcards indicate that my grandfather moved to Racine, Wisconsin, which at that time had a large Danish-American population. Here he worked for a local dairy known as The Racine Pure Milk Company, though at least one postcard, sent in July of 1914, is addressed to him at Ledgewood, North Dakota. Whether this temporary change of address reflects a summer vacation, a visit to a friend, or an unsuccessful search for greener pastures, is unknown. A photograph which has survived from this period shows my grandfather posing with his horse-drawn milk wagon in front of the dairy in Racine. The milk cans in the back of the wooden wagon are just visible under the canvas tarp and there is a retractable buggy top mounted to the back of the driver’s seat – no doubt for use as shelter from the rain.





Figure 1 (left). Map of modern-day Denmark showing the locations of the islands of Fyn, Langeland and Lolland.

Figure 2 (right). A more detailed map of the island of Langeland showing the major roads and towns.





*Figure 3.* Tranekær Castle as it appears today.



*Figure 4.* Main street of the village of Tranekær, Langeland, as it appears today.



*Figure 5.* The house in which my grandfather was born at Strandbyveg 7, Langeland, as it appeared in 1999.



*Figure 6.* The house in which my grandfather grew up at Nebbevej, Langeland, as it appeared in 1999.



*Figure 7.* The school which my grandfather attended as a child and young teenager.



*Figure 8.* Life at Nebbe after my grandfather's departure. *Left to Right:* My grandfather's maternal uncle, James Frederiksen; my grandfather's father, Morten Jensen; my grandfather's mother, Rasmine Jensen, my grandfather's brother, Alfred Jensen; various neighbors and farmhands.



*Figure 9 (left).* My grandfather (front row, left) at age 16, posing with school chums. Probably taken in Rudkøbing, c. 1908.

*Figure 10 (below).* A commemorative painting of the ship *Oscar II* of the Scandinavian American Line of Denmark entering New York harbor filled with Danish immigrants.





*Figure 11.* The main business district (Central Avenue) of Marshfield, Wisconsin, as it appeared around the time of my grandfather's arrival in 1909.



*Figure 12 (left).* Louis Thompson (1863 - 1934), the Marshfield policeman who befriended my grandfather on his arrival in Marshfield and paternal uncle of my grandmother, Marie Thompson.



*Figure 13 (left).* The first photograph of my grandfather taken after his arrival in Marshfield, Wisconsin, c. 1909, and sent home to his mother in Langeland.

*Figure 14 (below).* My grandfather's mother, Rasmine (right), and his older brother, Alfred (left), in the dining room of their home in Nebbe, Langeland, c. 1920.





*Figure 15.* My grandfather posing with his milk wagon in front of the Racine Pure Milk Company in Racine, Wisconsin, c. 1914.



*Figure 16.* Volunteers for Company F of the First Field Artillery, Racine, Wisconsin, May 1917. My grandfather is third from the left next to the bicyclist.



## II

# Preparing for War

**On** 2 April 1917 President Wilson declared war on Germany and on 13 May 1917 the Selective Service Act became law. This required that all eligible men between the ages of 21 and 31 register for the draft as of 5 June 1917. Only nonenemy aliens who had not yet begun the process of naturalization were exempt. The exact nature of my grandfather's residency status at the time is not known. Though still not a citizen, it is highly probable that he had begun the naturalization process and thus was not exempt. When coupled with the fact that he was also 24 years old and unmarried, there is little doubt that he would have been one of the first to be called up. In the end, however, he forestalled the inevitable by enlisting in May of 1917 – one of more than 400,000 first-generation immigrants to do so. My grandfather originally enlisted in Battery F of the First Field Artillery, a unit of the Wisconsin National Guard that dated back to the Spanish American War of 1898. After President Wilson's declaration of war, the Adjutant General of Wisconsin ordered the unit to expand from three batteries (A, B, and C) to six. One of these was recruited in Milwaukee (Battery D), one in Green Bay (Battery E), and one in Racine (Battery F). This meant that, like my grandfather, many of the men in Battery F were of Danish descent.

In early July the First Field Artillery was ordered to report for training at Camp Douglas, near Toma Wisconsin. At 7:30 am on the morning of 2 July, an estimated crowd of more than 30,000 gathered at the railroad station in Racine to witness the departure of Batteries F and C. Since most of the new units had neither rifles, artillery, nor horses, the majority of the time at Camp Douglas was spent in drill. The men were housed in pyramidal-shaped tents – between eight and

twelve men per tent – and were issued uniforms. The regimental historian later reported that the two most memorable incidents of their stay at the camp consisted of a grueling 15-mile rapid march over sandy roads with full packs and a violent rain storm that filled many of the tents with more than two feet of water. Several snap shots of my grandfather at Camp Douglas have survived showing him with groups of men from Battery F. In at least two of them, the characteristic pyramidal tents are visible in the background.

In mid-July the process of mustering the National Guard units into the United States Army was begun. The First Field Artillery became the 121st Field Artillery Regiment. This, in turn, became a part of the 57th Field Artillery Brigade, which served as one of two artillery support units assigned to the 32nd or “Red Arrow” Division, an infantry unit created by combining various National Guard units from both Wisconsin and Michigan. Since the army hoped to send troops to Europe by early 1918 and the winters in Wisconsin and Michigan were hardly conducive to tent life, the 32nd Division was shipped south to Camp MacArthur in Waco Texas for further training. Camp MacArthur was one of sixteen training camps or “cantonments” constructed by the army almost over night and named after various heroes of the American Civil War – Camp Grant in Illinois, Camp Sherman in Ohio, Camp Lee in Virginia, Camp Custer in Michigan, etc. Camp MacArthur was named after Arthur MacArthur, the father of Douglas MacArthur. The elder MacArthur had won fame early in his career for his valor during the Battle of Missionary Ridge in 1863 and, at the time of his retirement, was the highest ranking officer in the army.

Trying to raise and train an army of over two million men in under a year strained the organizational and supply capacities of the country almost to the breaking point. The cantonments were hastily constructed and inadequate almost from the beginning. Dealing with the sanitation problems alone became a major concern at most of the

camps. At Camp MacArthur, the contractors would make the mistake of building the water system from insect-infested lumber that had been standing around for months, with the predictable result that many of the trainees soon came down with typhoid fever. My grandfather's battery was in fact the first unit of the 32nd Division to be sent to Camp MacArthur, leaving Camp Douglas at noon on 18 August 1917 in the company of a pet goat, which they had stolen from Battery C the previous evening "after considerable intrigue." They had been assigned the task of working with the contractor in laying out the camp and were joined by the rest of the 32nd Division in early September.

Three additional mementos of my grandfather's army training have survived. The first is a three-foot long framed photograph of his battery in training at Waco. For many years this hung in the upstairs hall of my grandparents' home in Marshfield and it was a favorite game of myself and my cousins to try and locate our grandfather among his fellow trainees. The second memento I also recalled as a child as it was pasted in one of the many family photo albums that were kept in their living room. This was a faded snap shot of my grandfather, also a Camp MacArthur in Waco, standing at attention with his rifle. In the immediate background are the beds of one of the tent units. The tent itself has been folded back against the center post to prevent overheating of the interior in the hot Texas sun and, in the far background, the flat Texas landscape stretches away into the distance. The third and final memento resided in the bottom drawer of the dining room sideboard, though I was not aware of it until I was an adult. This is a picture postcard of my grandfather in an ill-fitting uniform and hat, probably taken at Camp Douglas. No doubt these photographic postcards were standard issue and were designed to be sent home in order to reassure the relatives.

On 5 February 1918 the 121st Field Artillery was shipped to Camp Merritt, New Jersey, near New York City and, starting at 5:00

am on the morning of 2 March, they were sent by train to Hoboken, New Jersey, and marched aboard the *USS Leviathan* for transport to England. During their stay at Camp Merritt, the troops were given a 24-hour pass to visit New York City, which my grandfather had not seen since passing through nine years earlier as a Danish immigrant en route to Wisconsin.

The *USS Leviathan* (nicknamed the “Levi Nathan” by the American troops) was actually a German ocean-liner, formerly known as the *Vaterland*, which had been confiscated from the Hamburg-American Line after war was declared. Nearly 8500 men and 1000 crew were squeezed into the ship, which was filled with canvas bunks from the deck down to the top of the boilers. The bunks were stacked four deep with 18 inch aisles between and most of the trip was spent in practicing evacuation drills in case the ship should be hit by German torpedoes. The fear of this was quite real, since the 32nd Division had already lost men when the transport ship, the *USS Tuscania*, was sunk by German submarines the previous month.

The regimental historian reported that, though the officers and crew were very concerned about the submarine threat and required that the men wear life belts at all times and participate in daily “abandon ship” drills, it became rapidly apparent that there were serious safety problems aboard the ship:

*These drills were useful in showing the men the methods of getting out of their quarters below the water line to the decks above, but they were also discouraging in that they demonstrated that in case of really abandoning the ship there were not enough lifeboats or rafts to sustain a tenth of those on board. When the ship’s officers were consulted privately, they admitted that the best thing to do, if the ship were sinking, would be to jump overboard and try to swim around until picked up by someone (identity unknown!). As the upper decks*

*were fifty to sixty feet above the waves, even this jumping business did not seem especially inviting.*

Charles MacArthur, a private serving in the 149th Field Artillery – a unit attached to the famous 42nd or Rainbow Division – recounted much the same story in describing his own passage to Europe five months earlier aboard the *USS President Lincoln*:

*... packed in the coal bunkers so tight that you couldn't talk without biting off somebody's ear, and a man had to be a contortionist to make a pass at craps. We slept in four layers, like a birthday cake. Every time the ship rolled, the entire battery did a trapeze act ... The trip occupied thirteen rather uneventful days, although the Captain did his best to make them exciting. Every day and night he predicted a submarine attack for the following ten minutes; and as we were in the direct center of the ship, below the water line, he assumed we were it for tag. With real concern he directed our course. The strong were to rescue the weak. We were to wear our woolen mittens as means of coping with the cold, wet ocean. We were to draw our pistols as we went over the side and shoot the submarine crew. We were to be brave.*

The most dangerous part of the journey was the ocean just off the western coast of Ireland, which was heavily patrolled by German U-boats. It was here, as the regimental historian later reported, that the men of the 121st Field Artillery had their biggest scare:

*The vessel was running without lights and between the decks it was as dark as a cellar. Almost everyone had retired early as there was nothing else to do. Suddenly, about 10 pm, the ship lurched violently while changing her course and there was a terrific explosion on H deck, below the waterline, followed by a crash of splintered wood and*

*the rushing of many feet ... There were several cries of “torpedo! torpedo!” and then mostly silence.*

Luckily, before general panic could break out among the still drowsy men, it was discovered that the explosion was actually due to the bursting of a steam pipe and the subsequent capsizing of a pile of tables by the men at the nearby guard station in their frantic efforts to make it to the upper deck.

On the morning of 11 March the *Leviathan* was joined by three American destroyers who accompanied her for the remainder of the trip. After a brief bout with sea-sickness, due to a violent storm off the coast of Wales, the ship pulled into Liverpool on 13 March in perfect weather. The next morning the regiment was shipped by train to Camp Winnal Downs, near Winchester, where they remained for four days. It was here that the Americans had their first experience with British rations – an undersized portion of cheese, bread, and tea, which was repeated, with distressing regularity, at each meal. The troops soon began referring to their new home as “Camp Cheese” or “Camp Dwindle Down.”

On the 18th, the regiment was shipped by train to Southampton, where they were loaded aboard cattle boats for the trip across the channel to Le Havre France. The boats were still in active use, taking cattle from France to England and troops from England to France on the return trip. Since they were not cleaned between trips, the officers and men were forced to stand shoulder to shoulder in cow shit on the open decks for the entire six-hour trip. “Taken all in all,” the regimental historian later lamented, “our memories of England were not especially pleasant and the general sentiment seemed to be that the trenches would be welcome when we got there.”

The men were quartered at Camp Sanvic near Le Havre until 21 March, when the artillery units were loaded aboard narrow French boxcars, cynically referred to by the troops as “Hommes 40,

Cheveaux 8” (40 men or 8 horses), and shipped to Camp Coetquidan near Rennes. Here each 200-man battery was equipped by the French with four 155 mm howitzers, eight gun caissons, a “chariot du pare,” a battery wagon, a rolling kitchen, a water cart, and 100 French horses. French artillery instructors were also provided, and for the next three months the regiment learned the art of handling heavy field artillery. The only reported problem was the difficulty of teaching the French horses to respond to English commands, a task which sent “a score of drivers to the hospital for treatment before the education of the animals was completed.”

Charles MacArthur, whose artillery unit was among the first to pass through the training program at Coetquidan, described it as “the most ghastly blight in all geography ... a pile of tar paper sheds floating in a mud puddle.” The lack of aesthetic appeal was matched only by the lack of sanitation, a situation which led to some interesting liaisons with the local women:

*We were given a set of shacks lately inhabited by German prisoners and put to work clearing them out. They were lousy, wet, and cold. For three days we struggled, digging up the dirt floors and spraying them with disinfectant, whitewashing and spraying the walls, paper windows, and paper ceilings, and fumigating the results. Since vermin habitually dropped from the ceiling, we had our heads shaved; which inspired some of the boys to leave scalp locks and fancy designs. Until they were seized and forcibly barbered a couple of guys wrought emotional havoc among the native women by palming themselves off as American Indians. Every woman in Brittany seemed consumed with a movie-fostered passion for Heap Big Chiefs at the moment, and the scalp locks maintained an unbeatable edge for nearly a week.*

Both the sanitary conditions and the interactions with the local populace appear to have improved considerably by the time my

grandfather's unit arrived in late March – at least if we are to judge from the regimental historian's failure to comment on either subject.

While the field artillery was busy practicing with wooden shells at Coetquidan, the infantry units of the 32nd Division were also undergoing further field training, but at Prauthoy, just north of Dijon in eastern France, rather than in Brittany. During this three-month period, part of the division was also assigned to supply and replacement duties. If the artillery regiments were having trouble communicating with their French horses, the infantry was having even more problems with the local French peasants. Almost none of them spoke English and their regional dialect was so thick that even the textbook French of the college-trained officers proved next to useless.

This linguistic impasse was finally resolved when, in early May, the division was transferred east to a relatively inactive section of the front near Belfort in Alsace, where it was joined by my grandfather's artillery regiment on 12 June. Alsace had belonged to Germany before the war. This meant that the local peasants not only spoke French but German as well, as did many of the American troops, who had come from Milwaukee or from various small German-American farming communities scattered throughout Wisconsin and Michigan. Indeed, Earl Goldsmith, a sergeant from Mosinee, Wisconsin, who served in Company G of the Division's 128th Infantry, recalled that there were so many German-Americans in the 32nd Division that people routinely referred to the unit as the "Gemütlich Boys." Needless to say, fraternization with the locals soon reached epidemic proportions. Ironically, it was the very war they were fighting that would destroy the common cultural heritage which had made this communication possible. War jingoism in the United States eventually resulted in laws prohibiting German language newspapers and organizations and to a ban on the teaching of German in American public schools – actions which effectively broke the back of the German language tradition in the United States.



During its stay in Alsace, the 32nd Division occupied the southern most portion of the western front – a sector 27 kilometers long extending from Aspach de Bas to the Swiss border. The 121st Field Artillery established its regimental headquarters at the town of Rougement and the individual batteries were dispersed among the smaller towns and villages – Battery F spending time at Etteufont, Bretton, LaGrange and Bellmagny. The reason for choosing this section of the front was to gradually ease the American troops into the routine of trench warfare. Indeed, for the first part of their stay in Alsace, they remained under the direction of the French 9th Division.

The relative inactivity in this section was the result of a tacit agreement between the veteran French and German troops, neither of whom saw any reason to make one another's lives unnecessarily miserable:

*The understanding between the French and Germans had been excellent in this sector and away from the actual front lines there was little sign of ruin or destruction. Villages well within the range of the German guns were unmolested and the civilians went about their business as though they had never heard of a war. Women often cut hay in the broad daylight along the edge of communicating trenches and barbed wire entanglements. In the early evenings the soldiers hid themselves to the lakes in the neighborhood and took their daily plunge. French vegetables were easily obtainable, and three percent beer was on tap in the cafes. The roads were good, the woods cool, the cuckoos sang merrily in the trees and payday arrived on time ... "If this is war," remarked a gallant corporal, "may there never be peace!"*

This idyllic picture was largely confirmed nearly 60 years after the event by Earl Goldsmith, when he was interviewed in 1977 at age 81:

*In May they moved us over to Alsace for trench training on what they*

*called a quiet area – but there were plenty of Germans soldiers over there in their lines using it for the same thing. Why, we could hear them Heinie bands playing at night. Those Alsatians were a lot different than the French we'd been with before. Some of them considered themselves French, all right, but I think most of 'em just figured they were Alsatians. And some of them figured they was Germans. While we was there one farmer actually plowed his field so it was pointed like an arrow at this concealed anti-aircraft gun the French had ... One of the good things about this sector was the beer. Don't ask me how, but the Alsatians could actually get this great beer from Germany itself. We all drank it 'cept this British sergeant we had with us. "It might be piezen, matie," he warned. Well, poison or not, we thought it was great!*

Goldsmith also revealed that the Wisconsin troops soon acquired habits unheard of back home:

*There's one more thing I want to tell you about the trenches. Haw! Haw! It's amazing how something like this sticks with you, but I can vividly see it now. You see, when we was on the front lines, you'd kind of relieve yourself as best as possible. But when you was back further, especially in the third lines, you had a regular privy trench. Now, one of the areas would be near where the women would pass by on their way to the fields. Well, we'd be sitting there, right on that "ole six-seater," waving away at 'em. "Bonjour, monsieur Américain, comment allez-vous?" they'd yell, grinning like hell. "Bonjour, mademoiselle," we'd yell back, "tres bien; et vous?" They'd carry on a regular conversation with us. Can you imagine that going on back in Wisconsin? I'll say not!*

But all good things must come to an end, and with the departure of the French troops on 27 June, the American command felt it



*Figure 17 (left).* My grandfather (kneeling on the left) with some of his fellow trainees at Camp Douglas, Toma, Wisconsin, July 1917. Note the pyramidal tents in the background.

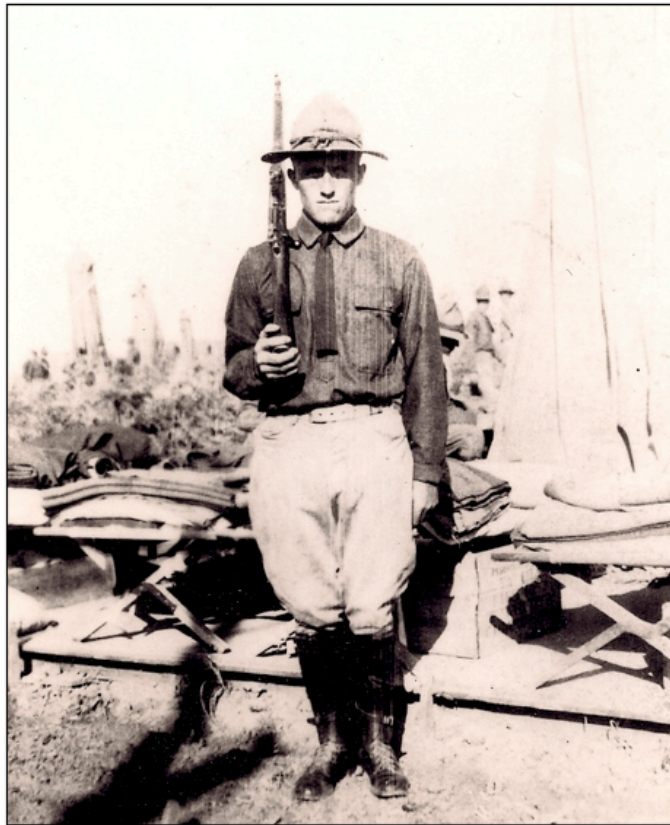
*Figure 18 (below).* My grandfather (third from right) posing with his tent companions from Battery F. Camp Douglas, Toma, Wisconsin, July 1917. Note again the characteristic pyramidal tents in the background.

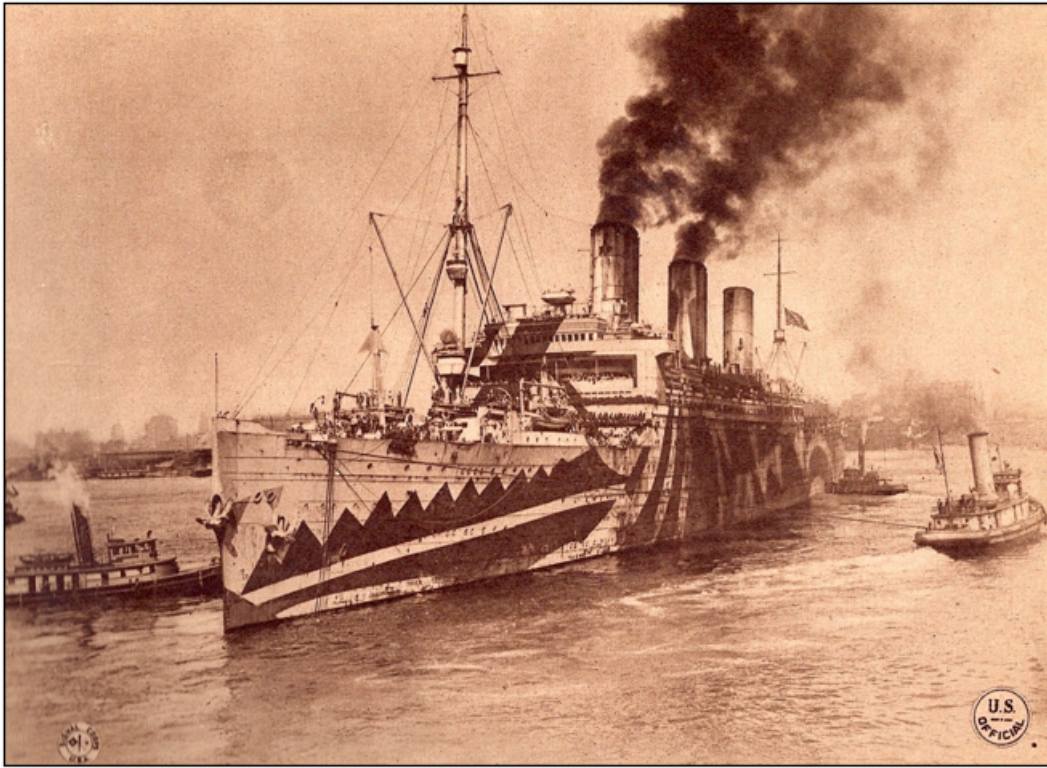




*Figure 19 (left).* A photographic postcard of my grandfather in his Wisconsin National Guard uniform. Probably taken while he was at Camp Douglas.

*Figure 20 (right).* My grandfather posing with his rifle at Camp MacArthur, Waco Texas, August 1917. Note the light-weight summer uniform, the folded tents and the exposed cots.





*Figure 21.* The *USS Leviathan* leaving Hoboken, NJ, with the 121st Field Artillery in March 1918.



*Figure 22.* Sleeping conditions aboard American transports – bunks four deep “like a wedding cake” with 18-inch aisles, no lights at night, and constant fear of submarine attack. Many found this more grueling than life in the trenches.

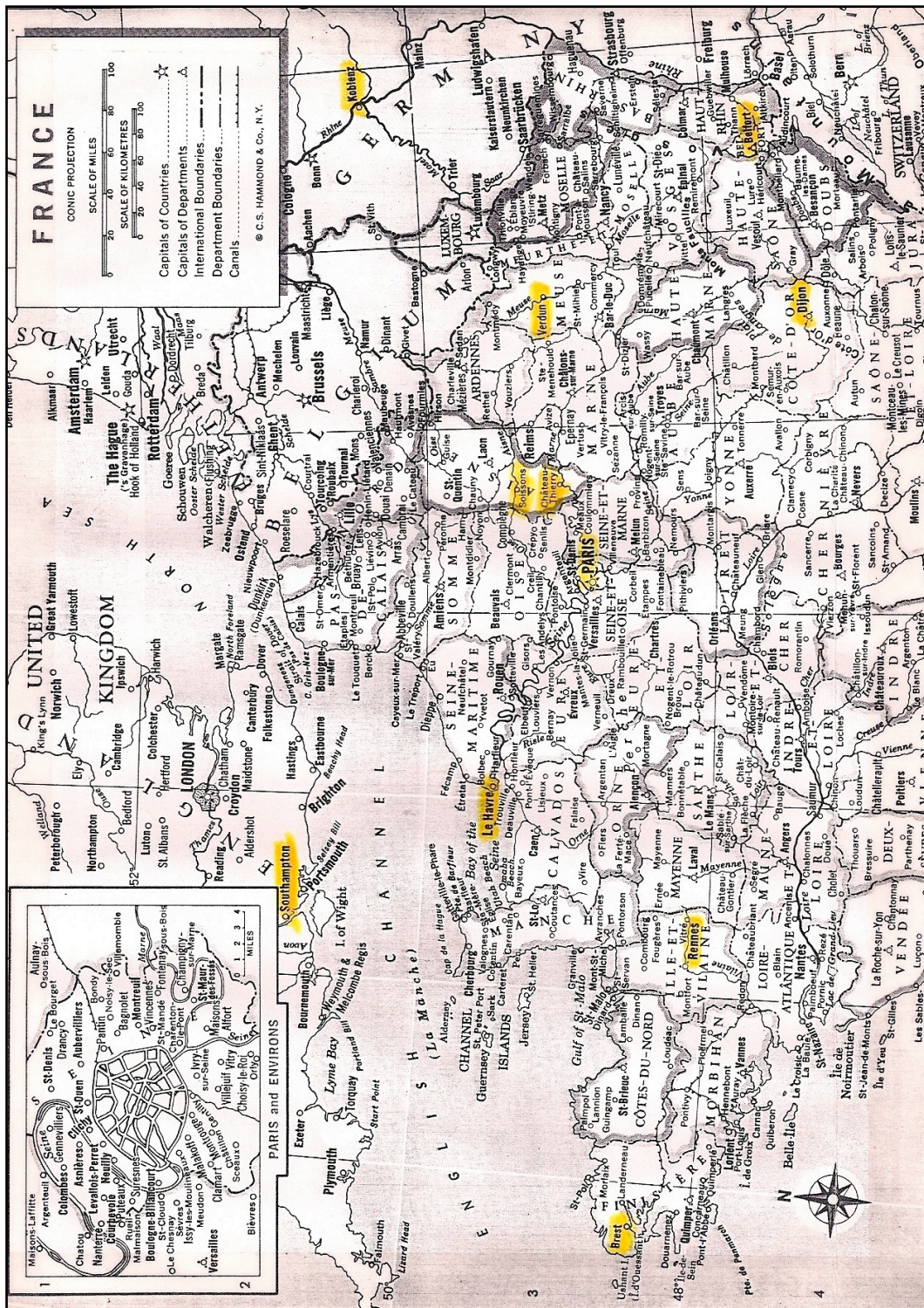
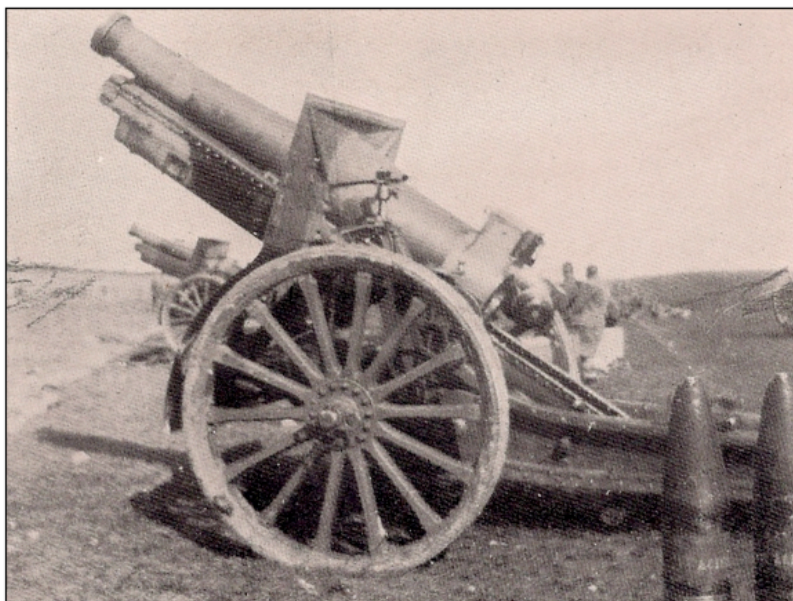


Figure 23. Map of France with sites related to activities of the 32nd Division highlighted.



*Figure 24.* American troops crowded for transport in French boxcars with “40 men or 8 horses” per car.



*Figure 25.* French 155 mm howitzers of the type used by heavy field artillery units and on which the 121st Field Artillery was trained at Camp Coetquidan.





necessary to prove itself. Consequently, over the next month they initiated a series of artillery exchanges with the Germans that would eventually cost the lives of 56 men. The most exciting of these occurred on 17 July when a chance shell from the American lines hit a German ammunition dump in the Nonnebruck Woods. High winds soon spread the fire to nearby German barracks and by the next morning nearly a third of the woods had been reduced to ashes. The American troops spent the night amusing themselves by taking pot shots at the German firefighters silhouetted against the flames.

### III

## The Aisne-Marne Offensive

**With** the collapse of Russia and Rumania in late 1917 and early 1918, large numbers of German troops became available for transfer to the Western front. Determined to exploit this numerical advantage before the buildup of American troops became significant, General Ludendorff launched a series of massive offensives in March, April, and May of 1918 in an effort to capture Paris and force an end to the war. Though these attacks failed to achieve their primary objective, they did produce large bulges or “salients” in the Allied lines, and in July the American Expeditionary Force under General “Black Jack” Pershing was assigned part of the task of pushing the Germans back to their original positions, if not beyond.

Beginning on 21 July the infantry units of the 32nd Division were shipped northwest by train, via Paris, to Compiègne, and then by motor bus and truck to Chateau-Thierry. Located at the southern most point of the Marne salient, Chateau-Thierry had just been retaken by American Marines the previous week. Since the long truck caravans crowding the narrow French roads encountered numerous traffic jams, the troops would kill the time during the all too frequent stops by disembarking from the trucks to search the recent battlefield for abandoned German helmets, guns, and equipment to take home as souvenirs. The more enthusiastic even began digging for better specimens, only to discover that they were often still attached to the partially decayed bodies of German soldiers who had been hastily buried under only one or two feet of dirt by the rapidly retreating German army.

My grandfather’s artillery regiment followed by train on 22 July. Passing through the eastern edge of Paris, the regimental historian

reported that the men were able to catch a glimpse of the Eiffel tower and several other prominent Parisian landmarks from the slits between the boards of their box cars. Thirty eight hours after leaving Alsace, the regiment detrained near St. Florentine and then proceeded by horse to Chateau-Thierry. As they neared the bottom of the salient they became more and more struck by the senseless vandalism committed by the retreating German troops "... houses willfully despoiled, and property maliciously ruined, in addition to the destruction to be expected in the course of modern war. In houses which were left standing, pictures had been slashed and books torn and burned."

On 27 July the 32nd Division began moving out of Chateau-Thierry along the Paris-Metz road. On the night of 29-30 July they encountered the Germans at the Ourcq river (known among the American troops as the "O'Rourke") and, during the next nine days (30 July - 7 August 1918), as part of what would become known as the Aisne-Marne offensive, they pushed them northeast 19 kilometers to the Vesle River, where they captured the town of Fismes on 4 August. Casualties incurred by the division totaled 3547. Impressed by the American performance, a French general referred to them in passing as "Les Terribles." The name stuck and became a badge of honor for the Red Arrow Division.

The artillery brigade came on line on the third day of the battle (1 August). That evening the regiment incurred its first death when a private named Hutchinson was killed around 9:00 pm by a bomb dropped by a passing German plane. On hearing the plane's engine, the inexperienced troops had mistook it for an American Liberty and had made the mistake of stepping out onto the open road to watch. That same evening Batteries D and F were attacked by three German planes while moving down the road between Le Charmel and Fresnes, but succeeded in driving them off with machine gun and rifle fire without suffering any casualties.

By 3 August, Batteries A, B, D and F had taken up positions in a deep valley near Chery-Chartreuve, about six kilometers south of Fismes, where they would remain for the next three weeks, exchanging almost daily artillery fire and mustard gas with the German guns to the north of the Vesle. The men soon began referring to their new position as “Death Valley.” The gas attacks meant that they often had to work the guns in the stifling August heat with their gas masks on – sometimes for as long as 12 hours at a stretch. As the number of dead and unburied horses began to climb (in the first 10 days alone the batteries would lose 102 or over 25% of the horses), large clouds of flies and bees began to appear. Eventually the decaying bodies contaminated the drinking water and the men began to come down with dysentery.

Many of these horses were not killed out right. Severely wounded from a shell, they would run screaming across the fields dragging their entrails behind them or would cough up their lungs from the mustard gas. My grandfather’s primary job in the artillery was to ride the lead horse on one of the gun caissons. Part of the driver’s responsibility was to put these maimed and wounded animals out of their misery by shooting them. Hervey Allen, a second lieutenant who served with the 28th Division throughout the entire offensive, would later leave a graphic account of the fate of these animals in battle – the gases from their decomposition causing the corpses to shift onto their backs “with their legs in the air, the stiff muscles looking as if they were carved out of wood,” and those killed outright by the shells lucky in comparison to those doomed to a lingering death from the mustard gas, “nosing for water and bleating in their throats ... their ribs sticking out like death and a white mucus coming out of their blind eyes.”

Allen also remembered the flies and the dysentery:

*Dysentery began to show up here due to the bad water we were forced to drink. Some of the men were absolutely prostrated and the condition*

*of the woods became bad, flies among other things ... Memoranda had been sent around warning us that the Germans had poisoned the wells and springs. Our water carts sometimes went miles, but it was impossible not to catch something sooner or later with the vast deal of decay going on.*

It was this “vast deal of decay” that also remained upper most in Earl Goldsmith’s mind when he recounted his own memories of the Aisne-Marne offensive six decades later:

*There was one thing that was everywhere – the stench of death. You can ask anyone who was there. God, it was awful. All those dead animals. Yes, and the men also. Remember, it’s July and August I’m talking about. I don’t mean to be too dramatic, but the stench never left you.*

A gun caisson was essentially a large rectangular shell crate or box mounted on wheels and was used to transport both artillery and ammunition. It was pulled by between two and six horses, depending on the size of the guns, with the drivers sitting astride the horses rather than on the ammunition box itself. Once the artillery was hauled into position, the caissons were used to continuously transport unfused shells between the gun emplacements and a centrally situated ammunition dump located further behind the lines (and hopefully out of range of German shelling). Generally the guns were positioned several miles behind the front lines, well out of both rifle and machine gun range, their major danger coming instead from the German artillery. Of course, there was always the possibility of the lines shifting so rapidly that the artillery became trapped in no-man’s land or of the emplacements being overrun by the rapidly advancing Germans. The gunners could estimate the probability of this latter scenario by following the trend in firing elevations. Progressively

increasing elevations meant the Germans were retreating, whereas progressively lower elevations meant that they were advancing.

German artillery was also the major threat to the caissons, as both sides made a habit of systematically shelling the access roads to the front. The caisson driver was often faced with the decision of whether to proceed directly across country, which was slower and carried the potential danger of becoming bogged down in mud or in a shell hole, or of following a quicker and surer route along the roads, where he was subject to both German shelling and the danger of becoming trapped in a mass of slowly moving infantry and ambulances.

A somewhat overdramatized account of how all of these factors came into play in the heat of battle was provided by Glenn MacArthur:

*Captain Stone burned out of the telephone central blowing his tin whistle. "Seventeen degrees and ten minutes! Snap into it!" We stood for a second, unable to believe our ears. The last elevation had been nearly eight thousand meters. And there was the skipper bawling a range that meant the Germans were a couple of city blocks away ... There were just ten shells in each gun pit. Half of them went bye-bye in the first frenzied minute. The range decreased in alarming kangaroo jumps. Only five shells to go. We slung them over, praying that the Germans would die of sunstroke or that God would do something about the ordinance department. He did. Around the hill in the back of the guns, on cue, rattled the first section caisson, hauled by six of the lousiest slobs in the animal kingdom. A more discouraged, seedier set of horses never lived, full of pneumonia germs and black thoughts toward the war, the world, and all mankind. As they plodded around the bend, a Comanche yell went up from the firing battery. The last shell was gone, the ranges were coming down, down. In another ten minutes the Germans would be in our laps.*

*The drivers somehow got the idea. Standing in their stirrups they began banging their teams' bony bustles with their steel helmets. Ten*

*minutes before the horses would have laughed heartily at such treatment. Chances are that they would have sat down in their traces and made faces at the corporals. Now they seemed to get the idea too. While four decreasing ranges were rattled off with no back talk from us, they reared in their harness, shook their heads a couple of times, and began to pound across the field – hoofs flying, mouths open and dripping suds. And they were such bags of bones, any respectable merry-go-round would have turned them down.*

*The second caisson made the turn banked on two wheels. The third, the fourth appeared; the drivers hanging over their horses' necks, whispering words of love while they socked hard at skinny rumps. The cannoneers broke the caisson and unloaded on the run. Shells were fused and fired in a beautifully controlled frenzy. The second caisson galloped up. A bucket brigade formed, and shells were thrown to gunners like basket balls. Miraculously, ranges took a jump. It was time. We were firing at spitting distance, nearly. The last shell went just as the third caisson came up. We jammed the new ammunition into hot bores without waiting to grease. Up twenty five ... Up fifty ... Up a hundred ... a hundred more ... Another hundred. The trembling, bow-legged horses sagged away. We slammed some more iron at increasing ranges. At last seven thousand, with the guns sweating paint and burning up the air. Cease fire – this time, no kidding.*

Although the infantry units of the 32nd Division were relieved by the 28th and 77th Divisions on 7 August, the artillery was ordered to remain behind in order to provide support for the relief units. The four batteries in the valley near Chery-Chartreuve were, of course, only a small segment of a vast firing line that extended for many miles in either direction – a line which Allen encountered, not far from the position of my grandfather's battery, on the evening of 14 August, two

days before his own infantry company descended into the valley of the Vesle to join the assault on Fismette, north of the river:

*There was no longer any pretense of hiding the guns; they simply stood out in fields or at the edge of woods, and that night the “display” was unusually intense. The Germans were making a stand on the Vesle, a few kilos away. When the drum fire was at its height there was one wood that seemed to be a grove of lightnings with a constant seething flame along its front, and great jets and tongues of fire cut the darkness like knife stabs everywhere through the meadows. The officers gathered into a little hushed group and watched it. After the thunder ceased, the silence seemed strange ... the next evening, by the flickering light of the cannon on a hundred hills, we started on our march to the Vesle.*



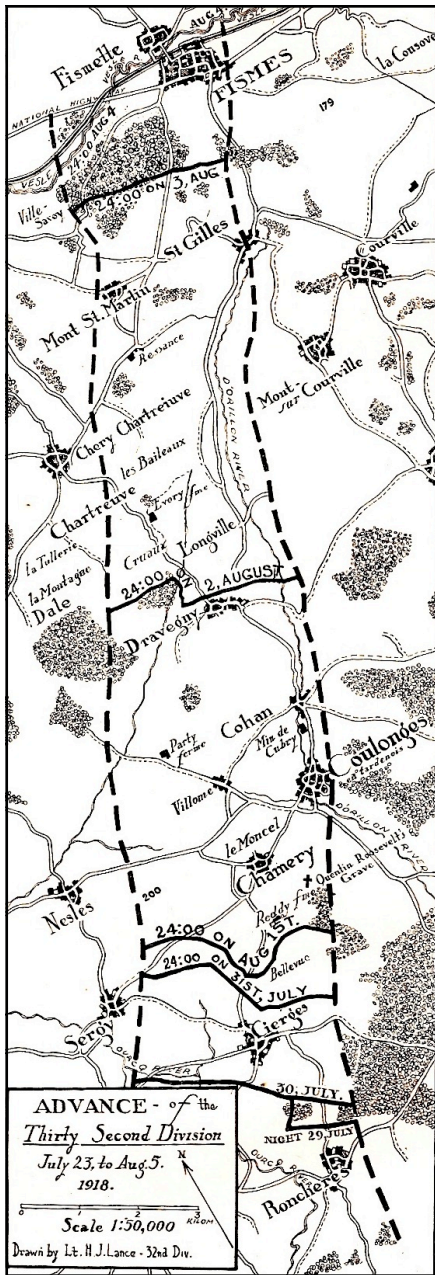


Figure 26 (left). Map detailing the participation of the 32nd Division from 25 July-5 August 1918 in the Aisne-Marne Offensive.

Figures 27-28 (below). Two views of the ruins of Fismes France after its capture on 4 August 1918.



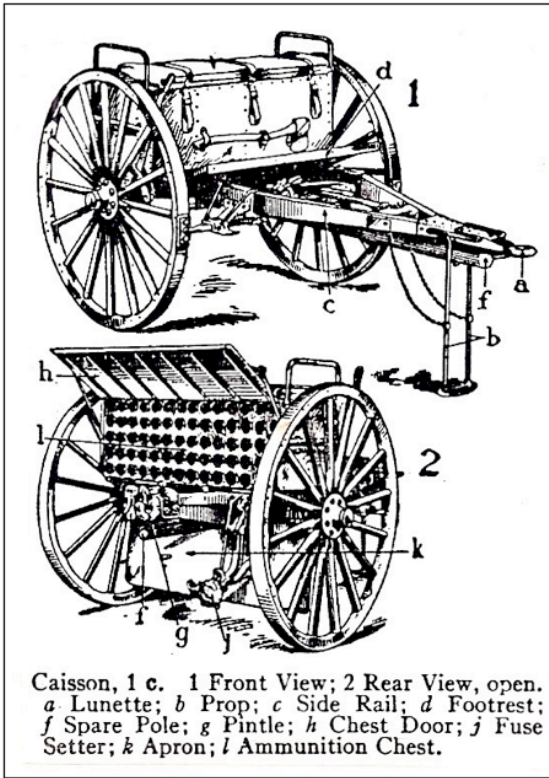


Figure 29 (left). Diagram of a typical gun caisson used to haul both cannon and ammunition.

Figure 30 (below). A gun pit in action showing the rapid firing of a French-made 75 mm field gun typical of that used by the American light artillery.



## IV

### The Oise-Aisne Offensive

By the last week of August, the French Commander and Chief, General Foch, finally became convinced that the Germans were too strongly entrenched to the north of the Vesle for the Allies to continue with a direct frontal attack. Instead, he decided to attack the German right flank. Consequently, on 23 August the 121st Artillery was ordered, without an intervening rest period, to undergo a four-day forced march to the northwest to a staging area near Soissons, where it was again joined by the infantry units of the 32nd Division, which had spent the previous two weeks in rest and training. Here, between 28 August and 2 September 1918, as part of what would become known as the Oise-Aisne offensive, they again went into action, pushing the Germans roughly five and half kilometers to the east and playing a key role in the capture of the village of Juvigny on 31 August and the Terny-Sorny Bethancourt road on 1 September. Casualties incurred by the division prior to being relieved by the 1st French Moroccan Division (French Foreign Legion) on 2 September totaled 2891.

It was at Juvigny that my grandfather's battery had its closest brush with disaster. About 4:00 pm on 30 August, Batteries D and F were driven off the Bagneaux road by German planes. They took cover in a shallow valley just west of Juvigny, where they found themselves a few rods ...

*... behind an infantry line, firing rifles, which seemed rather unusual. Then a mess of gas shells and high explosives began to fall while the horses were being unhitched. Finally machine gun bullets began to whistle overhead and rifle balls began to strike the trees and carriages. Too late it was learned that the infantry had fallen back*

*from Juvigny to the railroad embankment above the artillery position while the batteries were on the road and that the batteries were now to experience some of the joys of life in the front lines. Shells dropping among the carriages killed several horses and the baggage wagon was totally destroyed in an instant by a shell which exploded inside the wagon box under the driver's seat. Battery F seemed to have had the worst of this position, as it was closer to some old barracks which served for an adjustment point for the German fire. One man killed and sixteen injured, was the toll taken here from the Racine outfit.*

Juvigny was also a near disaster for Earl Goldsmith's unit:

*Oh, there was a hot spot! ... We went into town from the left, where it seemed those Germans concentrated their fire. That's where I had the flap over my revolver cut right off of my holster. We took the place all right, on August 31 – but those Heinies didn't want to leave us do it. On the next day we were still going at it. It was the worse day of the war for my platoon. The Germans had several machine guns left around town, and we had to knock them off. There was one of them that our bunch had to take, and we tried it head on. God, it was a slaughter! They just kept mowing us down. But Lieutenant Harris – what a great guy he was – he kept trying to rally us until he was cut in two. Then I had to take over the platoon. I got us all into this old trench to take a count. Of the forty we had started against that damn Maxim, there was only twelve left.*

When the 32nd Division was relieved on 2 September, the artillery was again ordered to remain on line in order to support the Moroccans, which they did until 6 September, when they were finally relieved and given a week's rest near Wassy.

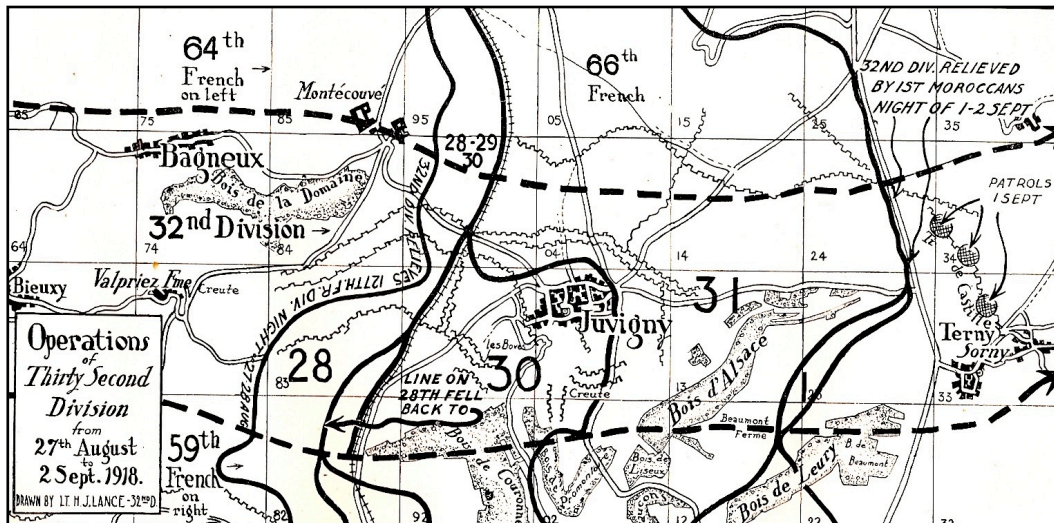


Figure 31. Map detailing the participation of the 32nd Division from 27 August - 2 September 1918 in the Oise Aisne Offensive.



Figure 32. The ruins of the village of Juvigny France after its capture on 31 August 1918.



## V

# The Meuse-Argonne Offensive

**A**fter three weeks of rest and reserve duty, the 32nd Division was sent east on 22 September to a region immediately northwest of Verdun, where on 30 September it again went into battle near the village of Cierges as part of what would become known as the Meuse-Argonne offensive. By 9 October, the division had taken both Cierges and the town of Gesnes and now found itself in front of the “Kriemhilde Stellung,” one of the heaviest fortified sectors of the original Hindenburg line. It would take the Americans six days (9-14 October 1918) to breach the Stellung and to capture the fortified hills of La Cote Dame-Marie to the west and the village of Romagne to the east.

Pershing ordered the 5th and 42nd Divisions to attack the eastern and western flanks of the Stellung, respectively, while the 32nd Division was ordered to keep the defenders of the Cote Dame-Marie occupied by making a frontal attack. By the second day, both the 5th and 42nd Divisions had begun to make headway with their flanking movements, spearheaded on the left by the 84th Brigade under the command of General Douglas MacArthur. It had apparently been Pershing’s original intention that the 32nd Division should merely keep the Germans on the Cote Dame-Marie pinned down, but the Division’s commander, Major General William G. Haan, thought otherwise and instead ordered a direct attack on the fortified ridge. The Cote Dame-Marie was steep enough to qualify as a bluff and the wooded ravine in front was filled with newly laid barbed wire. Though Haan ordered a preliminary shelling of the wire and ridge on 8 October, it caused little damage.

In a scene reminiscent of the costly lessons learned earlier in the

war by the French and British about the futility of massed attacks, German machine gun fire literally mowed the men from Wisconsin and Michigan down by the hundreds before they hit the first row of barbed wire. Things went from bad to worse when a battalion of the 126th Infantry found a gap in the sea of barbed wire and the troops became packed even closer together in a futile attempt to push their way through the opening. Finally the battalion commander called a halt to the slaughter and the troops watched as eight volunteers slowly worked their way up the face of the hill under a hail of bullets and eliminated the machine gun nests using rifle grenades, after which the division successfully stormed to the top of the ridge.

The division then pushed north another four kilometers to Bois de Bantheville (Bantheville Woods), where it was finally relieved on 20 October 1918. The cost of breaching the Kriemhilde Stellung was high, with the total casualties numbering 5877, or almost as many as the previous two offensives combined. In addition, the weather had turned bitterly cold and it had rained throughout most of the 20 days of battle, thus making the troops doubly uncomfortable. Four years of continuous shelling had put so much particulate matter into the air that, by late 1918, Europe was experiencing a miniature version of “nuclear winter” with abnormal amounts of rainfall and unseasonably cold weather.

In what had by now become a predictable routine, the division was assigned to rest and reserve status in the Montfaucon Woods close to the front line until 1 November, when they again rejoined the Meuse-Argonne offensive to the east of Bantheville, as part of a push designed to drive the Germans east of the Meuse River. On 5 November units of the 32nd Division crossed the Meuse on a pontoon bridge located at Dun-sur-Meuse and participated in the capture of the town of Brandeville. During the night of 9 November the rest of the division also crossed the pontoon bridge and attacked the Germans on the morning of 10 November, pushing them about eight kilometers to



the east of the river. They were preparing for a second attack, to take place at 7:00 am on the morning of 11 November, when, at five minutes to seven, runners from headquarters brought the news that Germany had surrendered and had agreed to officially cease all hostilities as of 11:00 am that morning – the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month. In the last week of the war the division incurred another 721 casualties.

My grandfather's artillery regiment actually came on line on 26 September, four days before the infantry units of the 32nd Division. It provided artillery support for the 79th Division until 6 October, when it rejoined the 32nd for the assault on the Kriemhilde Stellung. When the 32nd was relieved on 20 October, it again remained behind in order to support the 3rd and 89th Divisions, not being relieved until 8 November 1918. So much artillery was used in the opening barrage on 26 September that there was hardly room to walk between one gun carriage and another. The shelling began at 2:30 am and continued without pause for three hours:

*It sounded as if all the thunder in the skies had been released at one time, and the flashes of the guns served pretty well for lightning. And when the shells began to burst on the other side of the fence, there was a steady roar that shook the earth.*

At 5:30 am there was a pause – “oppressive and silent.” This served as the signal for the infantry to go “over the top.” Three minutes later, as timed by the nervous officers, the shelling began again, this time as a rolling barrage. In order to ensure that the barrage would keep pace with the advancing troops, the gunners now began sweating in a “frenzy of exertion” in their attempts to continuously adjust the elevation of the guns in accord with the coordinates shouted by the officers.

However, the greatest problem in the first week of the campaign was the congestion on the narrow roads leading to the front. Traffic

soon slowed to less than a kilometer per hour, when it moved at all. “Getting artillery ammunition to the front,” recalled the regimental historian, “was a terrible job involving days and nights of sleepless effort to make a round trip from battery to the dump and back again. Food supplies came seldom and at irregular intervals.” Even more distressing were the consequences for the ambulances. German shelling had destroyed a field hospital near Montfaucon, necessitating its evacuation. As the caisson drivers hauled ammunition to the front in the freezing rain, they were greeted by the sight of litters lining the side of the road bearing the bodies of dead men taken from the evacuation vehicles – men who had not died of their wounds but rather of exposure and starvation in the stalled ambulances.

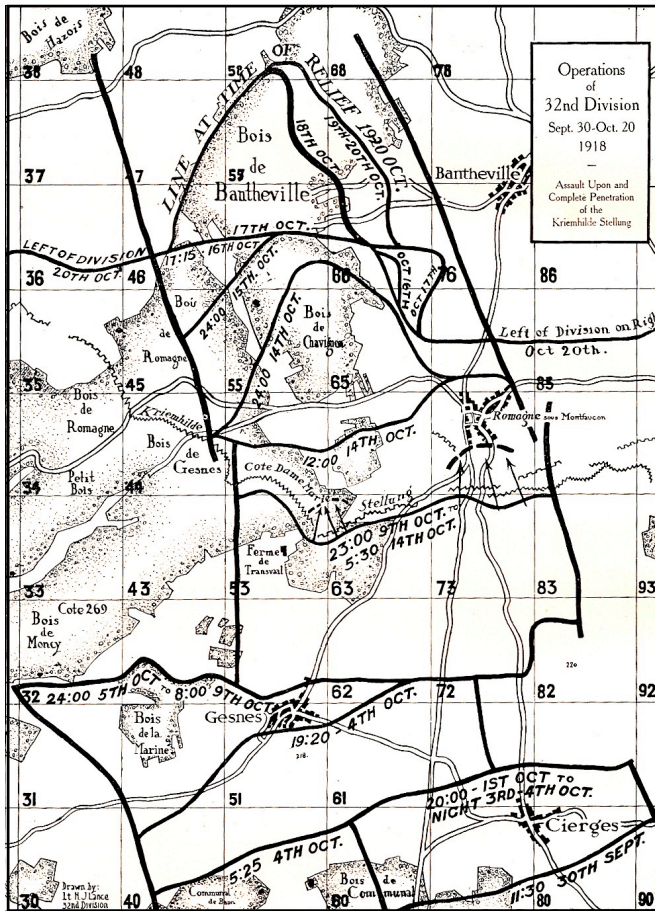


Figure 33 (left). Map detailing the participation of the 32nd Division from 30 September to 20 October 1918 in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive.

Figure 34 (below). The ruins of Romagne France after its capture in October of 1918.





*Figure 35.* Congestion on the roads leading to the front during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive in October and November of 1918.



*Figure 36.* The fate of a caisson hit by German shelling many miles behind the lines. On the right the stretcher bearers remove the body of the driver. The ruined caisson and dead horses are visible to the left.

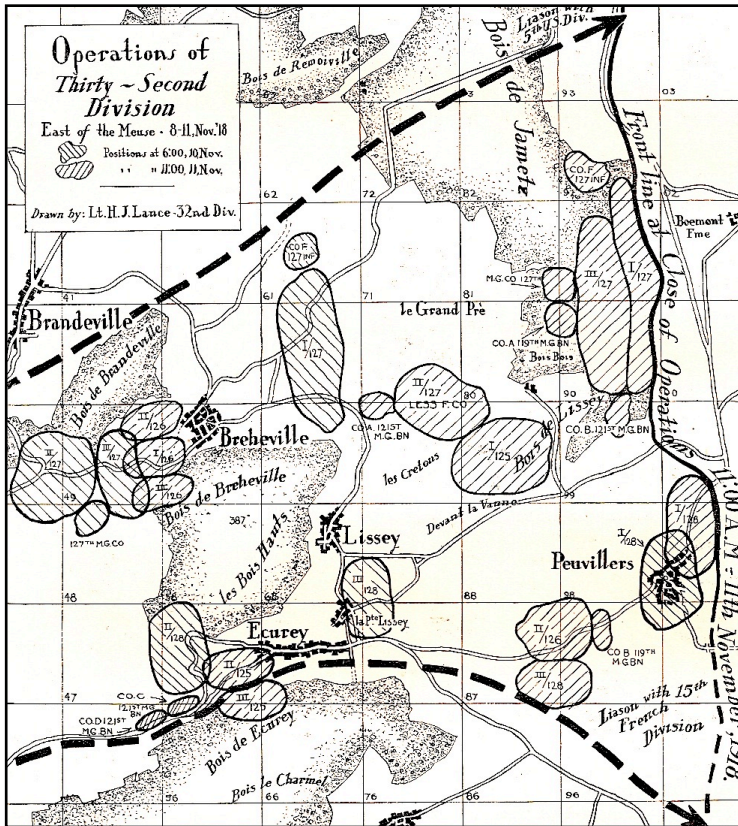
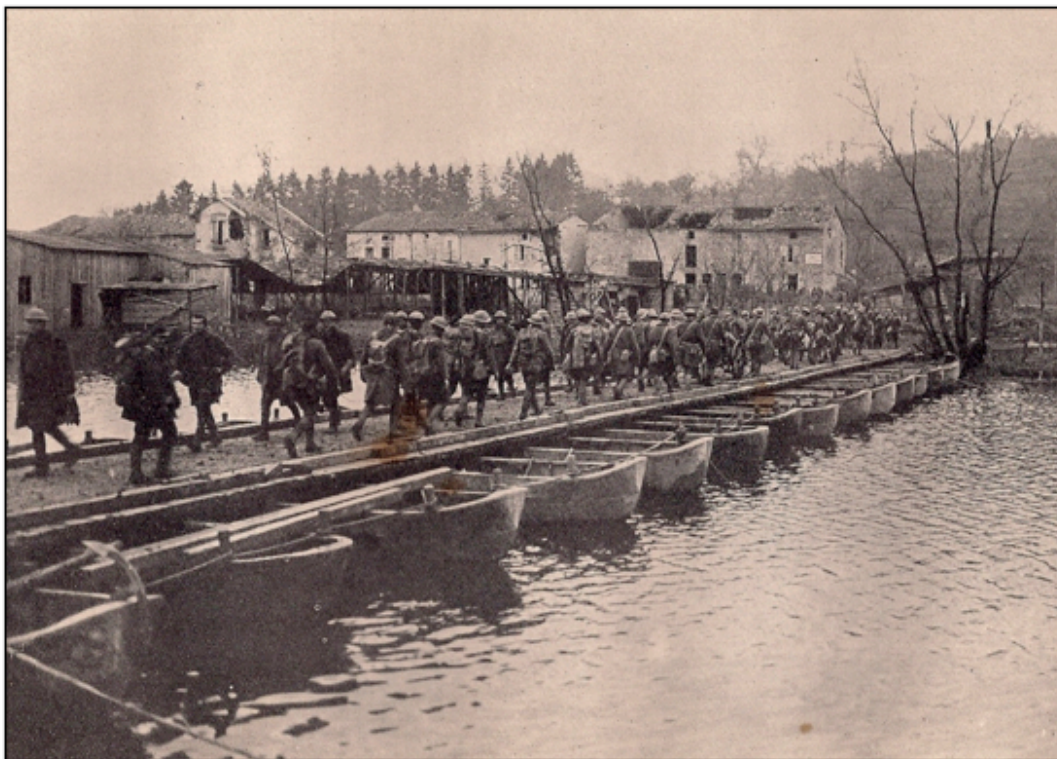


Figure 37 (left). Map detailing the activities of the 32nd Division between its crossing of the Meuse River on 5 November 1918 and the end of the war on 11 November 1918.

Figure 38 (below). Elements of the 32nd Division crossing the Meuse River on 5 November 1918 on the pontoon bridge at Dun-sur-Meuse.





## VI

### Cost, Occupation and Discharge

My grandfather's war books claim that 77,629 Americans died in the 19 months that the United States was at war, nearly a third of them from disease rather than battle, and almost all of them during the last four months of the conflict. Though these accounts convey the impression of great meticulousness – with every detail and every casualty accounted for – more recent estimates suggest that they are in serious error and instead put the number of American dead as high as 122,500. This is about 5.9% of the more than 2,084,000 troops shipped to France. It is more than twice the total deaths incurred in the Vietnam War, which were spread over more than 14 years, rather than four months, and is between one half and two thirds the death rate for the French, Germans, British, and other combatants, when their total casualties are averaged over each month of the war.

My grandfather's total time at the front, including a one week rest period, was slightly over three months, from 1 August 1918 to 8 November 1918. During this period his division incurred slightly over 13,000 casualties, of which about 2800, or 22%, resulted in death. Almost 77 pages of my grandfather's copy of *The 32nd Division in the World War* are filled with fine microprint columns listing the dead by name. Also listed are their rank, unit, cause of death, date of death, and the name and address of their next of kin. Many of these addresses give the names of towns and villages in Italy, Montenegro, Sweden, etc. indicating that the casualty in question was an unmarried first generation immigrant and the only member of his immediate family to come to the United States. At least one casualty was a full-blooded American Indian by the name of Isaac His-Horse-Is-Fast. His father, Robert His-Horse-Is-Fast, is listed as the next of kin with an

address at White Horse, North Dakota. It is sobering to realize that this soldier's grandfather might well have participated in the massacre of Custer at the Little Big Horn in 1876. It can hardly be imagined what this grandfather would have thought of his grandson's death 42 years later in the service of his former enemy, in a country he had never heard of, separated from his home by an ocean of unimaginable size.

At some point, my grandfather must have gone through this list and counted the names one by one as his totals are written at the end in a spidery script:

*Enlisted men: 2614*

*Officers: 141*

*Total: 2755*

In many ways the Americans were lucky. They had no Joffre or Haig to repeatedly and senselessly order them to almost certain death and, with their arrival, the war seemed to regain some of the mobility it had lost by the end of 1914, when it had bogged down into four gruesome years of trench warfare – long periods of mud and tedium punctuated by periodic bursts of mass slaughter. 1916 was typical. On 21 February of that year the Germans launched a massive assault on the underground forts surrounding the city of Verdun, not far from the sector where my grandfather's division would fight its last battle nearly three years later. The attack began with a two-day bombardment involving 1400 artillery pieces and over two million shells. At a rate of 100,000 rounds per hour, the shelling rapidly obliterated the open trenches in front of the forts along with their occupants at a cost of several thousand artillery shells per body. The ensuing battle would drag on for almost a year and, by the time it ended, on 18 December 1916, the casualties would total almost one million men – 542,000 French and 434,000 Germans.

In July of the same year, during a lull in the fighting around



Verdun, the British and the French launched their own offensive further to the north opposite the Belgian border. Known as the battle of the Somme, it began with an artillery bombardment on 24 June. However, because of bad weather, the infantry assault was postponed until 1 July, by which time the Germans had refortified their lines. Using dense attack formations against the well-placed German machine guns, the British would lose over 57,000 men in the first day of fighting alone. For the next four and one half months the opposing armies hammered at one another day and night. By the time it ended, on 18 November 1916, an 18 mile-long section of the front had shifted roughly seven miles at a total cost of one and a quarter million casualties – 650,000 Germans, 420,000 British and 195,000 French. The German losses alone were equivalent to the total casualties of Desert Storm lost every 30 minutes, every hour, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for 18 weeks. They were roughly five times the casualties killed or injured by the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima in 1945 and ten times those at Nagasaki.

But for sheer killing efficiency and futility nothing topped what happened in Belgium in June of 1917. Over a period of two years, Welsh miners in the British lines managed to dig 24 tunnels under a key German position known as Messines Ridge and to pack 19 of them with over one million pounds of high explosives. At 3:10 am on the morning of 6 June 1917, the British detonated the charges. Though it is not precisely known how many Germans died, it has been estimated to be as high as 20,000 – roughly a third of the total deaths incurred in the Vietnam War, spread not over 14 years, but over less than 14 seconds. The British Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, had been informed of the plan and stayed awake that night to listen for the explosion, which could be clearly heard in London, nearly 200 miles from its point of origin. The ensuing British attack cost another 25,000 casualties and shifted a ten-mile section of the front by only two and a half miles. It was far more literal than metaphorical when

the British poet, Wilfred Owen, chose to begin his famous poem, *Anthem to Doomed Youth*, written before his own death in the trenches, with the line:

*What passing bells for these who die as cattle?*

The terms of the German surrender called for an Allied occupation of the Rhineland (i.e., all of Germany lying to the west of the Rhine River) until such time as the German army and navy were disbanded and Germany had paid her war reparations. A neutral zone, 40 kilometers wide, was also established along the east bank of the river. In order to maintain control of all of the major bridges crossing the Rhine, the occupation zone was extended about 20 kilometers into the neutral zone to form so-called “bridgeheads” centered at three key points along the river – one at the city of Mainz, which was occupied by the French; one at the city of Cologne, which was occupied by the British; and one at the city of Koblenz, which was occupied by the Americans. Consequently, on 17 November 1918 the men of the 32nd Division began a 300-kilometer march through Luxembourg into occupied Germany, where they manned the so-called Koblenz bridgehead until early April of 1919, when they withdrew to the port of Brest in western France. Ironically, my grandfather’s artillery brigade did not participate in the occupation. By 8 November 1918, when it was finally withdrawn from the front line during the last days of the Meuse-Argonne offensive, it had lost so many horses and mules that it was incapable of further movement. In addition, the almost continuous use of its guns throughout the previous three months had so worn their barrels, that they were now virtually useless. As a result, the 121st Field Artillery was left behind in France, where it was temporarily assigned to the 88th Division. The dead horses were also not replaced. Instead, the regiment was motorized.

The winter of 1918-1919 was miserable. With the end of the war,

Allied support services for the American Expeditionary Force seemed to collapse and the American troops remaining behind in France found themselves spending most of their time trying to find adequate housing and enough to eat. In addition, influenza had broken out in the United States in the fall of 1918 and had been brought to France by the most recent troop arrivals. At Camp Pontenezen, near Brest, which would serve as the departure site for American troops being shipped back home, nearly 12,000 of the more than 65,000 men in the camp were stricken with the flu at the same time, with a death rate of over 250 men per day.

A high point in this dreary scenario came for my grandfather's artillery regiment on 20 January 1919, when a nearby train wreck provided them with a sudden and unexpected surplus of French delicacies:

*Beaucoup champagne, vin blanc, eggs, chocolate and cookies. Thousands soused. Liquor buried under every hay pile and hidden in every corner. Battery D had 1100 eggs for breakfast. Battery C matched this with champagne and cookies. Barrack partitions were crammed with chocolate and other contraband. The occasion was beyond description, and no one present will ever forget it.*

On 7 April the regiment was finally reassigned to the 32nd Division and, eight days later, they were shipped to Camp Pontenezen, where, on 30 April, they were marched aboard the *USS Georgia* for transport back to the United States. On 19 May 1919 the men of the 121st Field Artillery were officially discharged at Camp Grant in Illinois. My grandfather's discharge papers describe him as 5 feet 4½ inches in height, with blue eyes, brown hair, a fair complexion, good health and excellent moral character, and recommend that he be awarded travel pay. Our final photographs of him in uniform were taken at a professional photographer's studio after his return home and

*My Paternal Grandfather*

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show the corporal stripes that he received on discharge. The combination of the close-fitting, well-tailored uniform, the close-shaven head, the Teutonic features, the square heavy-set jaw, and a certain coldness in the eyes always reminded me more of my stereotype of a German officer than of an American Doughboy.

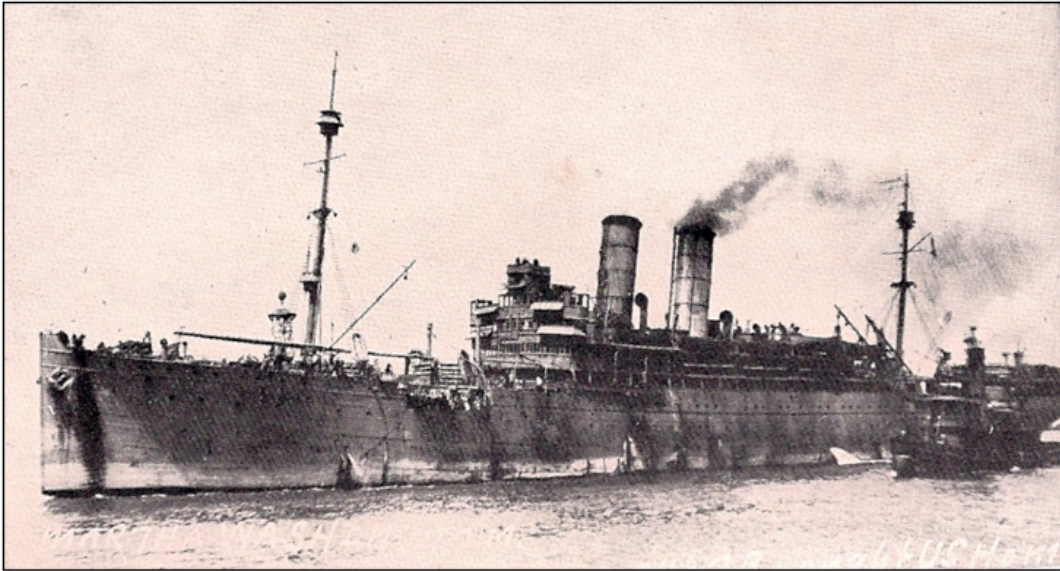


Figure 39. The *USS Georgia* leaving Brest France with the men of the 32nd Division.



Figure 40. Men of the 32nd Division aboard the *USS Georgia* en route back to the United States.



*Figure 41 (left).* Formal photograph of my grandfather in his uniform taken after his discharge in May of 1919.

*Figure 42 (right).* Second portrait of my grandfather taken after his discharge in May of 1919. This pose was the one he chose to have framed though I prefer the version shown in figure 41.



## VII

### The Tin First-Aid Box

**Aisne**, Oise, Marne, and Meuse are, of course, not only the names of French rivers but also of French provinces, and the offensives which they describe each encompassed dozens of individual battles for villages, towns, strategic hills and fortifications – not just major objectives, such as Fismes, Juvigny, Cierges, Gesnes, Romagne, and the Kriemhilde Stellung, but countless smaller obstacles overcome along the way, such as Bois de Grimette, Hill 212, Bellevue Farm, Hill 230, Bois de la Plancette, Reddy Farm, Bois de Morine, Bois de Chene Sec, Hill 255, Hill 269, Hill 258, Tranchee de la Mamelle, Tronsel Farm, etc. I do not know the details of my grandfather's involvement in these specific engagements, as he had died before I was old enough and interested enough to question him about his war experiences. The only personal insights come indirectly from my mother, who told me that my grandfather once confided to her that he was so frightened during his first bombardment that he literally “shit in his pants.” He also suffered partial deafness in one ear as the result of a nearby shell explosion. He later received some form of veteran's compensation for this disability, and my uncle Harold can recall him visiting the Marshfield Clinic for treatments during the 1930s, as well as the Fort Snelling Veteran's Hospital in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Shortly before being shipped home, my grandfather requested permission to visit his mother and siblings (his father had died in 1913) in Denmark. For whatever reason, this was denied, and each Christmas, thereafter, he would get tipsy and begin crying about the fact that he never saw his mother or sisters again after leaving Denmark at age 17. In the retelling, he would claim that he had been stationed only a few miles from the Danish border, though an

inspection of a map of Europe shows that one must pass through Germany in order to reach Denmark from France. Apparently the distance became shorter and shorter with each annual retelling of the tale. Compared to the width of the Atlantic Ocean and of half of the continental United States, the width of Germany had been reduced to virtually nothing in my grandfather's imagination.

My initial knowledge of the larger offensives came from my grandfather's campaign medals, which were kept in an old tin first-aid box. This was originally stored in the closet of my grandparent's downstairs bedroom but was transferred to one of the upstairs closets after his death, along with his hats, canes, and various items of his clothing that had been saved by my grandmother. My grandparent's home was singularly lacking in books and toys and, in the absence of visiting cousins to play with, our visits as young children were always an exercise in boredom. After the usual store-bought cookie from the kitchen cookie jar and a glass of *7-Up* from the refrigerator – two treats which we never got at home – followed by an attempt to trap my grandmother's aged and uncooperative dog, Fuzzy, behind the living room couch – my brother at one end and myself at the other – we would usually escape upstairs to explore the bedroom closets, which at that time still contained interesting memorabilia left behind by my uncles, including, among other things, an old violin, a Japanese officer's sword, and various high school art projects. It was here that my brother and I first discovered the tin first-aid box.

I knew the significance of this discovery even before opening the box. I could dimly recall an evening many years earlier when I was playing with my brother and cousins on the floor of the living room. My grandfather, mother, and aunts are sitting on the couch and my grandfather is passing around the contents of the tin first-aid box. As each medal reaches my mother, she holds it out for me to inspect, after which I return to my games on the floor. However, at one point there is a sudden burst of protest from the women and when I stand up to



examine the object in question, my mother tells me I cannot look at it. Shortly afterwards the box is returned to its storage place. The mystery of this dimly remembered incident was soon solved, for when my brother and I opened the box, we discovered not only my grandfather's campaign medals but also two badly-wrinkled photographs showing mutilated and partly-decayed bodies lying in no-man's land, which he had obviously kept as a reminder of the realities of war.

Years later, when I again examined the box in order to record his war record, I found that the photographs were gone and, when I mentioned them to my aunt and uncles, they denied that they had ever existed. My brother, however, also remembers them and I suspect that my grandmother destroyed them shortly after our accidental discovery. It must be remembered that this was long before computer simulation had made images of rotting and dissolving bodies a commonplace for every horror movie-going child and, believe me, the contents of these photos were of such a nature as to leave a lasting impression on the minds of two young boys who had no previous experience of such things.

Though I am certain that my grandmother's primary motive in destroying the photographs was to prevent a similar incident with the other grandchildren, I also have the feeling that there was a secondary motive at work as well. I think that she somehow felt that the photographs might possibly imply something vaguely unwholesome about my grandfather and that she wished to destroy the evidence. But, in fact, as Niall Ferguson has recently shown, my grandfather's preoccupation was hardly unique. Photographs of this sort have been found in the surviving scrapbooks of most World War I veterans, whether Allied or German, though they almost never appeared in the official histories of the War published throughout the 1920s. All combat soldiers are exposed to the lessons of sudden and violent death, but then the dead are buried and the soldiers move on to a fresh battle ground. It is the uniquely static nature of the First World War

that seems to have instilled in its veterans a sense not only of death but of decay as well. Hundreds of bodies entangled in the barbed wire of no man's land were unretrievable and the soldiers on both sides were forced to watch the day by day progress of their disintegration. Battles were repeatedly fought over the same ground, so much so that they had to be given Roman numerals, like bad movie sequels – Somme I, Somme II, Ypres I, Ypres II, Ypres III, etc. The artillery bombardments from one battle would churn the ground up, often uncovering the dead from the earlier battle, and many a soldier found himself sharing a shell hole with a freshly disinterred corpse. One British officer reported being stationed in a newly dug trench into which projected the arm of a corpse that had been buried roughly four feet below the surface. The trench was so narrow that the men had to brush against the arm each time they moved past it. Eventually they became superstitious about it and would shake its hand before going out on patrol.

My grandmother's act of censorship also calls to mind a related incident involving a stereoscope which I had inherited from one of my maternal uncles, complete with a set of stereoviews of the First World War published by the Keystone View Company. My mother had carefully gone through the stereoviews and had removed any that showed dead bodies or mutilated soldiers. There was one view, however, on which we managed to reach a compromise. This showed the explosion of a British ammunition wagon which had been directly hit by a shell. The explosion, down to the individual pieces of shrapnel, burst from the stereoview with magnificent three-dimensional clarity. Only the rear end of the wagon was visible in the act of being tossed into the air. Since no dead men or mutilated horses were apparent, my mother allowed me to keep it. However, my grandfather disliked it intensely. Having been a wagoneer in the field artillery, he knew from the position of the explosion in the stereoview that the shell had, for all practical purposes, landed directly in the lap of the driver.



*Figure 43 (left).* A typical photo of war dead showing the bodies of two Germans left to decay beside the remains of their machine gun mount and similar to those kept by my grandfather in the tin first-aid box along with his war decorations.



*Figure 44.* Similar photo of the decaying bodies of German soldiers left behind by the retreating German army – all of them apparently killed by the direct hit of a single shell on their dugout.



The only other war memorabilia was my grandfather's combat helmet, which hung in the garage next to a large, faded photograph of Fuzzy as a puppy. As a young boy I was fascinated by all things military. I had vast collections of toy soldiers and was always playing war. I knew that my maternal great great grandfathers and uncles had fought in the Civil War, that my grandfather had served in World War I, that my father and paternal uncles had served in World War II, and that I had maternal uncles who were currently serving in the Korean War (which, at the time, I confusedly but logically mistook for World War III). Indeed, on one occasion, I upset my first grade teacher by propounding the theory that there was a continuous war in progress in Europe and that, when of age, each generation automatically went there to fight, that each generation's service was denoted by the proper numerical label of I, II, III, etc., and that, when I came of age, I was going to go off to fight in World War IV.

In any case, I dearly wanted my grandfather's helmet, but alas so did the rest of my all-too-numerous male cousins, and my grandmother, in order to avoid charges of partiality, allowed none of us to play with it. Many years later, when my grandmother was finally put in a nursing home, my aunt gave me both the helmet and the framed-photograph of my grandfather's company in training at Waco Texas. By rights these should have gone to my oldest cousin, Michael, but he had become a Jehovah's Witness and was not suppose to own or display anything military in nature. Consequently, as the second-oldest grandchild, they were given to me. But alas, I was in my 20s by then, the Vietnam War was in full swing, and my enthusiasm for things military (which had never amounted to anything more serious than a childish fascination with uniforms) had undergone a substantial change. Both items now reside in my attic, unseen, unappreciated, and probably doomed to a future estate sale since I have no children of my own.

## VIII

### Home and Job

**A**fter the war my grandfather returned to the Marshfield area and began to court my grandmother. On 20 January 1920, nearly eleven years after coming to the United States, and after serving almost two years in its armed forces, my grandfather became a U.S. Citizen. One month later, on 18 February 1920, my grandparents were married, and their first child, Harold Thomas, was born in January of the next year. For the first two years of their marriage they lived with my grandmother's parents on the Thompson farm near Nasonville. In 1922 my grandfather gave up farm work and took a job with the Roddis Lumber and Veneer Company in Marshfield. For obvious reasons, my grandparents also moved into town, living first in an upstairs apartment on East Ninth Street and then in a house located at 1310 South Richfield Street (later relabeled 1412 Maple). In 1927 they purchased the neighboring house at 1308 Richfield (later relabeled 1410 Maple), where they lived for the rest of their lives.

This house was typical of turn-of-the-century farm houses and working-class homes in Wisconsin. These houses were frequently built in stages, often separated from one another by many years, if not by several owners. The first stage began with the building of a simple rectangular one and a half- or two-story frame or log house. This usually had four rooms – a living room and kitchen downstairs and two bedrooms upstairs. The second construction stage involved the addition of a one-story side wing with both front and back porches. This gave the houses their characteristic T-shape and was normally used to rehouse the kitchen, thus freeing up the old kitchen for use as a downstairs bedroom or as a back parlor. The third construction stage involved enclosing and extending the back porch for conversion into a

smaller, more modern, kitchen. This freed the side wing for use as a dining room. The fourth and final stage, which was seldom reached, involved the addition of a second floor to the side wing to create more bedrooms. Indoor toilets often were not added until much later and were usually converted closets or pantries.

My grandparents, my mother, my brother and his family, my in-laws, and both of my maternal great-grandparents all lived in various versions of this structure. In the case of my mother and brother, the houses had progressed all the way to the fourth stage. In the case of my grandparents and in-laws, it had stopped at the third stage, and in the case of both great grandparents, the houses remained frozen at the second stage. These progressive changes also required that the outside of the house be periodically re-sided to make it appear as a unified structure. When carried to their logical conclusion, these progressive consolidations left only the thickness of the door jams and window sills in the living room as indirect evidence of an underlying log structure.

These houses were always very plain, with none of the gingerbread trim normally associated with Victorian homes, and the resulting drabness was further accentuated by the practice of painting everything on the outside white, including the trim and window moldings. They were homes without visual contrast – suited, I suppose, for tenants whose lives also lacked contrast. The only touch of Victorian elegance in these houses were the front doors – “doors” rather than “door” because one of the peculiarities of their construction by stages was that they ended up with two front doors at right angles to one another – one leading into the living room of the original two-story structure and the second into the one-story side wing added later. The upper half of these doors usually contained a large frosted-glass window etched with a bucolic scene depicting either grazing cows or wild deer.

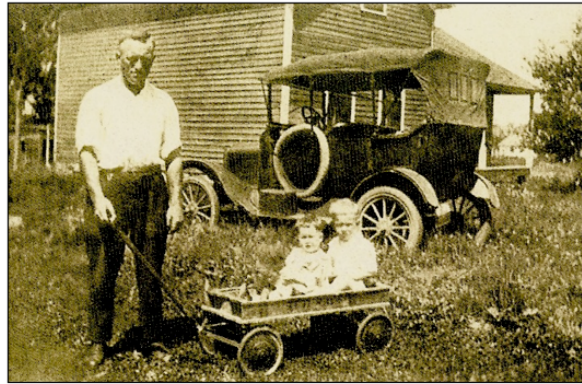
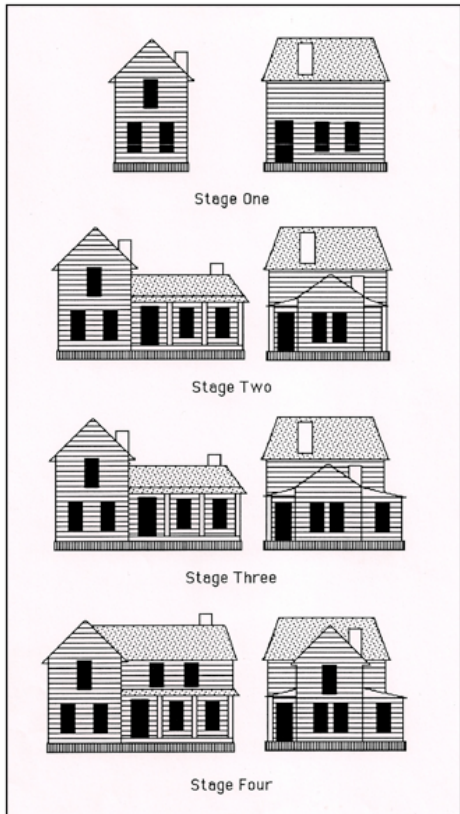
The initial stage of my grandparents’ home corresponded to a one

and a half-story log house, so the upstairs ceilings had a substantial slope. My father and his three brothers slept in two beds in the larger of the two upstairs bedrooms and my aunt in the smaller room at the top of the stairs. My grandparents slept in the downstairs bedroom just off the living room. By the time my grandparents purchased the house, it had reached stage two, and in the 1930s they did a great deal of further remodeling. This included adding a connecting garage, enlarging the enclosed back porch for use as a modern kitchen by removing an adjoining bathroom and reversing the basement stairs; conversion of the original kitchen and pantry into a dining room and modern bathroom, respectively; and the installation of additional windows in the front and south side of the house. In addition, my grandfather later enlarged the basement, in order to accommodate a modern oil furnace, by laboriously shoveling the dirt out of one of the original basement windows. By 1937 the house had been re-sided and painted white and the front porch had been screened in. This was the house as I remember it, and it did not change for the rest of their lives.

Roddis (now a part of Weyerhaeuser) was, and still remains, Marshfield's largest employer. My grandfather began as a laborer in the lumber yard, where he was taught the art of grading lumber. By the time he retired in 1950, at age 58, he had worked his way up to superintendent for both the yard and the sawmill. His job apparently entailed a certain amount of travel in order to inspect lumber prior to purchase, as I still have several picture postcards, which he jokingly addressed to me shortly after my birth, showing highly idealized views of various third-class hotels in Northern Wisconsin and Upper Michigan. Even after his retirement, he continued to inspect and grade lumber on a consulting basis for various lumber companies, sometimes traveling as far north as Canada. He also taught others how to grade, including my uncle Gordon.

A snap shot of him taken during one of his trips to grade lumber shows him standing on a railroad track. He is flanked on either side by





*Figure 45 (above, left). The evolution of a typical Wisconsin working-class home. Figures 46-47 (above, right). Two snapshots of my grandparent's home at 1410 Maple Street in Marshfield as it appeared in the 1920s. The top view shows the front of the house and my grandfather pulling my aunt Crystal and uncle Harold in a toy wagon. The bottom view shows the back of the house and the large kitchen garden which my grandfather kept. Sitting among the potatoes are my aunt Crystal and my uncles Gordon and Harold. Figure 48 (below). The house as it appeared in the 1950s after remodeling and as I remember it.*





*Figure 49.* The foremen at Roddis Lumber and Veneer, c.1939. My grandfather is seated to the far left with his arms crossed.



*Figure 50.* My grandfather (back row, far left) with his saw mill crew at Roddis Lumber and Veneer, May 1939.

towering stacks of cut lumber and a sign in the foreground of the photo identifies the location as the “St Paul Terminal Warehouse Co.” It is midwinter and he is wearing laced leather boots which extend to his knees, a heavy winter coat with a fur collar, and what my brother and I always called his “Elmer Fudd” hat. This was a cloth cap with a continuous ear-neck flap and a chin strap. Except in the coldest weather, the cap was worn with the ear flaps turned up and tied over the peak with the chin strap. As children, the only other person we knew who wore a cap of this sort was Bugs Bunny’s arch nemesis, whence our name for it. I still have this cap tucked away in a box somewhere in my attic.

I also possess a group photograph of the foremen at Roddis, taken sometime in the late 1930s. My grandfather is seated to the far left of the group with his arms crossed over his chest. He is sporting a moustache which, when combined with the stiffness of his pose, his severe facial expression, and his wire-rim glasses, gives him the appearance of a petty martinet. According to my grandmother, the moustache soon disappeared, as it turned out to be reddish in color, which my grandfather could not abide. But it did not go without a struggle. My aunt Crystal can recall him attempting to deny nature by darkening it each morning with a grease pencil. Apparently he soon tired of the ritual.

## IX

### Behind the Piano

**After** we moved to Wausau in August of 1956, my grandparents would come to visit at regular intervals, but I remember little of these visits as I and my brother would usually be playing outside. My grandfather would give us each a quarter to come in and kiss him, but our business transaction ended, we would immediately run outside again to continue with our games. Though still in his early 60s, it was obvious that his health was rapidly declining. It seemed to me that he always had stubble on his face and that he had that peculiar odor about him characteristic of elderly people suffering from kidney disease.

When he was dying of complications from diabetes, he was kept on a hide-a-bed couch in the dining room. He would lie there semi-conscious, occasionally making violent snorting sounds. These would act as a signal for my grandmother to make one of her periodic, but generally futile, attempts to free up his nasal passages. It was her theory that they had been irreversibly damaged by his excessive use of nasal sprays – a practice which, in turn, probably resulted from his having snorted and chewed snuff for most of his adult life. From time to time he would become delirious and would carry on conversations in Danish with his dead mother and sister. Meanwhile, my younger cousins would run back and forth through the room playing, while a few feet away in the kitchen the women would be talking and preparing meals. For the final crisis he was taken to the hospital, where he died on 27 August 1960 at age 68. I recall my older cousin Michael crying at the funeral and most of the day back at the house. Perplexed, I asked my mother what was wrong with my cousin. She explained that as a small boy he had lived with my grandparents

while his own parents were separated and that he had actually known my grandfather as a person, which I had not. This answer satisfied me intellectually, but emotionally it meant nothing to me. I was twelve when my grandfather died.

In those days dying at home was not the rarity it has since become. I can recall another example involving my mother's younger sister, Kathy. She had married into a German farming community located about 45 miles east of Wausau. My brother and I often spent part of our summers at her house, which was located about a half mile down the road from the farm of her mother-in-law, Selma Hoffman, or "Ma Hoffman," as we all called her. Most of Ma's grandchildren were about the age of my brother and consequently we often played with them and so spent almost as much time at her farm as at my aunt's house.

During my last year of high school, Ma Hoffman's aged father, Anton Heins, came to live with her. Although he could no longer walk, was blind, and was over 101 years old at the time, he had managed to outlive three wives and was basically in good health. The old upright piano was placed across the center of the living room to act as a room divider and "Grandpa" Heins was kept in a bed behind the piano. He could speak English, but he preferred German, and since I was taking German in school at the time, I offered to read to him in German. Unfortunately his taste in literature was restricted solely to the old testament and especially to those parts dealing with fire, brimstone, and everlasting damnation, which were not very effectively rendered by my high-pitched adolescent voice. Indeed, my high-pitched voice, when coupled with the softness of my hands, which he would feel as a means of identification, made it difficult to convince him that I was not a girl, and I certainly wasn't interested in presenting him with definitive anatomical evidence to the contrary. In any case, he could not understand my schoolbook German pronunciation, so my efforts to communicate were soon abandoned and he was left to his

*My Paternal Grandfather*

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own devices to spin out his last days in darkness behind the living room piano.

I can remember sitting at the other end of the living room with my brother and a large collection of the old man's great grandchildren watching the 5:30 cartoon shows on the television. It must have been late fall or early winter because the room was pitch dark except for the bluish light of the television screen playing over the faces of the watchers. From time to time Grandpa Heins would bellow something out in German from the darkness behind the piano. The great grandchildren paid no attention. From long experience they had become indifferent to his periodic ravings. Of course, I was the only one in the room who understood German and the only one who knew that he was begging his old testament God to let him die. Apparently his God answered his prayers as he eventually developed bed sores and bled to death. He was 102 at the time.

## X

### Awful Things Happened

I once asked my grandmother, long after my grandfather's death, whether he had ever said anything to her about his war experiences. It was not her nature to give long detailed answers, especially if the subject in question was unpleasant. In these situations her brief reply always had the undertone of a resigned sigh, as if to imply that she wished it was different. "He didn't like it. Awful things happened" – and that was the end of the conversation. It is, of course, not difficult to imagine what these awful things might have been, since many others have left written accounts. A typical example was provided by Father F. P. Duffy, a Catholic chaplain serving with the 42nd Division at the Kriemhilde Stellung, when he recounted in his memoirs the results of a direct shell hit on a group of five German prisoners and their four American escorts:

*We ran up and I found one of ours with both legs blown completely off trying to pull himself up with the aid of a packing case. In spite of his wounds, he gave not the slightest evidence of mental shock ... He had no idea his legs were gone until a soldier lifted him on a stretcher, when I could see in his eyes that he was aware that his body was lifting light. He started to look down, but I placed my hand on his chest and kept him from seeing.*

Even more graphic is the account left by Hervey Allen in his book-length narrative of the Aisne-Marne Offensive – *Toward the Flame*:

*About two o'clock a poor "kid" came to my dugout, evidently with*

*something to say, but he couldn't say it. He led me over to the fourth platoon trench ... The Germans had the trench "cold;" the place was full of dead and wounded. Three direct hits had accounted for fifteen. I was so frightened myself, I could scarcely get the men together. One sergeant, cool as a cucumber, came up and gave me an immense sense of help. There were three or four maniacs from shell shock whom we had to overpower. We dug some of the poor devils out and started them up the hill. The faint sounds and stirrings in the caved-in banks were terrible. Some we could not reach in time, and one of these was smothered ...*

*Lieutenant Glendennings and I took some men and went back to the fourth platoon trench. We took shelter halves and blankets and went through the ditch and picked up arms and hands and everything. Some things we just turned under, and the most we buried in a great shell-hole. Then we pulled out the men that were smothered in the dirt; some were cut in pieces by the shell fragments and came apart when we pulled them out of the bank. Lieutenant Quinn, a Pittsburgh boy, who had just got his commission a week before, was so mixed up with the two men who had lain nearest to him that I do not know yet whether we got things just right.*

The devastating effects of a direct shell hit were also vivid in Earl Goldsmith's memory after six decades, though he recalled that death could come in more unexpected ways as well:

*And what those shells could do to someone's body – God, just turn it to nothing! Then there were other times when just one little piece of shrapnel could do the job. I remember one time when there were three of us in this ravine. Casey Jones was on my left, and a fellow by the name of Chatfield was on my right – he was an American Indian from around Ashland Wisconsin. A big shell came over and landed in front of us. I didn't think it was close enough to be a bad one, but I'll be*



*damned if one piece didn't hit Chatfield in the side of his head. He'd just turned to talk to me, so his face was pointing in my direction. It must have driven clean through his brain, because the poor guy was dead; he looked just like he'd gone to sleep.*

This account may well be Chatfield's only memorial. Although he is listed among the dead in my grandfather's war book, the entry under next of kin reads "unknown."

Just what "awful" meant in my grandfather's case, we will never know for certain – perhaps the memory of the hundreds of dead and mutilated horses, or the sight of those wounded men dying of exposure and starvation in the stalled ambulances lining the rain-drenched road near Montfaucon in late September of 1918. But, however traumatic his war experiences, they certainly did not dampen his nostalgia for the comradeship of the armed forces and he remained an active member of the American Legion his entire life. Indeed, about the only reading materials in my grandparent's home were the numerous books on the great war that my grandfather had purchased through his association with the Legion: *The 32nd Division in the World War*, *U.S. Official Pictures of the World War*, *In Commemoration of the Foreign Service and Home Celebration of the 32nd Division*, *Souvenir of the First Annual Reunion of the 32nd Division*, etc.

Among my possessions is a large group photograph mounted on cardboard showing my grandfather and his fellow legionnaires lined up along the boulevard on West Second Street. It is either very early Spring or late Fall. Though there is no snow on the ground, the crowd is uniformly dressed in heavy dark wool dress coats, topped off by a sea of hamburg hats and eight-point caps. My grandfather is standing dead center and is holding one of the flags. In the background, above the branches of the naked trees, one can see the buildings of the Marshfield Milling Company. Though the exact date of the photograph is unknown, the group probably represents the Marshfield delegation

to the first Annual Reunion of the 32nd Division, which was held in Milwaukee in 1920.

One of my grandfather's special duties in connection with the Legion was to decorate the graves of veterans in the Nasonville Cemetery with flags each Memorial Day. As a boy, my uncle Harold used to accompany him, and recalls that my grandfather knew the locations of all the graves by heart and took great pride in the fact that the Legion had assigned him the "honor" of performing this annual service. Further insight into my grandfather's activities at the Legion can be inferred from his copy of *The 32nd Division in the World War*. In that 77-page list of the dead, mentioned earlier, he has placed a check mark next to seven names, all of whom are from Marshfield or the Marshfield area:

Private William Arnet, son of John Arnett, 612 E. 3rd St, Marshfield

Corporal John Fisher, son of Mrs. Henry Schmidt, RFD 4, Marshfield

Corporal William S. Petri, son of August Petri, RFD 1, Rozellville

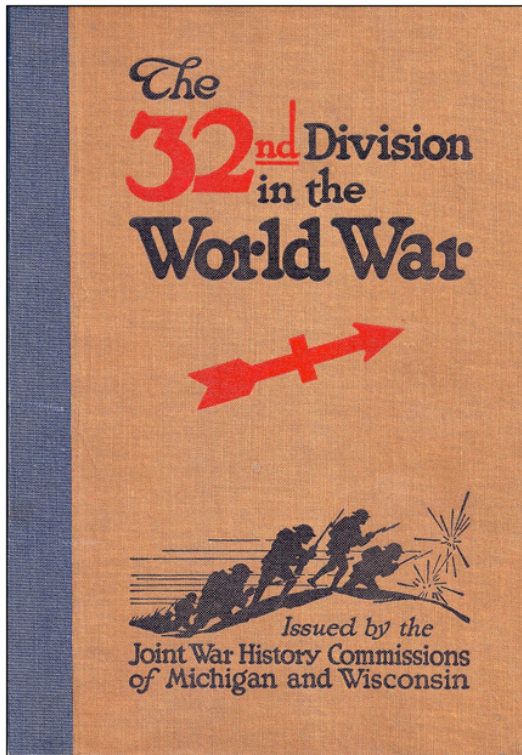
Sargent Willard D. Purdy, son of Mrs. Edgar Purdy, Box 632, Marshfield

Private Nick Trierweiler, son of August Trierweiler, 312 W. 4th St., Marshfield

Second Lt. Everett L. Verney, son of Mrs. A. Verney, 405 W. B St. Marshfield

Corporal Raymond Winch, son of Carlton Winch, 901 E. 9th St., Marshfield

While it is conceivable that these are the names of men whom my grandfather knew personally, it is far more likely that they are marked for purposes of a Legion commemoration of some sort, or perhaps they are the names of the men whose graves he decorated each November. Not only were all of these men from the Marshfield area, they had all served in the same unit – Company A of the 127th Infantry – and, with the exception of Purdy, all of them had been killed in early August of 1918, most likely during the battle for Fismes. Purdy, on the other hand, is listed as having been killed



*Figure 51 (left).* My grandfather's copy of *The 32nd Division in the World War* which he used as a reference source in connection with his duties in the American Legion.

*Figure 52 (right).* My grandmother's favorite portrait of my grandfather showing him in 1939 at age 47, the year he served as the Commander of the Marshfield American Legion Post.





accidentally on 4 July 1918, probably as a result of an overly enthusiastic independence day celebration gone bad.

Ironically, though my paternal aunt and surviving uncle know nothing of my grandfather's experiences during the war, my mother does. My grandfather apparently found it easier to tell these things to a nonfamily member than to his own children – or perhaps, like children everywhere, they were simply not interested. My maternal uncle, Larry, was twelve when he first met my grandfather in 1944 and recalls that my grandfather spent part of the day showing off his war medals, his combat helmet, and a gas mask (which had long since vanished by my time). It takes no great psychological insight to fathom the function of his membership in the Legion. It provided an environment where he could share common, if often traumatic, memories – memories which it was inappropriate to share with one's family and friends.

My grandmother's favorite portrait of my grandfather shows him at age 47, the year he was elected Commander of the Marshfield American Legion Post. He is heavy set, with a receding hairline, and is wearing rimless octagonal glasses. The moustache is gone and his American Legion pin is clearly visible in the lapel of his jacket.

## XI

### Reminders Everywhere

**O**n looking over what I have written about my grandfather's war experiences, it strikes me that a reader might well wonder why someone of my generation should have such an awareness of the First World War. But, in fact, the reminders of the Great War were everywhere when I was growing up. The average World War I veteran was still in his late 60s when I finished high school in 1966, and I think that I bought my last poppy in 1980 from an aged gentleman who was selling them in the asphalt parking lot of the shopping center across from our house in Madison. Veterans of the Second World War were still in the midst of raising their families and pursuing their careers. Unlike the veterans of the First World War, they had not yet reached the age of nostalgia.

The absence of toys at my grandparent's home and my dislike for sports meant that I automatically focused on my grandfather's war memorabilia. Protests of the politically correct aside, most young boys are naturally attracted to this sort of thing, and I would page through his war books every time we visited. Since we did not own a television until I was in second grade, the set of war stereoviews, inherited from my uncle Montie, also occupied my attention far more than they would for the average boy of today. Reinforcement came from other quarters as well. When I was ten, a colleague of my father gave me a World War I helmet and a glass canteen to use in my war games. Shortly afterwards, one of the boys at church, by the name of Conrad Davis, announced to his mother that he had suddenly outgrown childish things and promptly made me a present of a bag containing all of his toy soldiers. Again, these were of World War I, rather than World War II, vintage and were made of lead. I was able to salvage

only about a dozen. The rest of the bag contained only deformed chunks of metal with an occasional protruding arm or leg. Conrad's idea of playing with toy soldiers apparently entailed pouring gasoline over them and lighting them on fire.

Prior to his hormonal epiphany, he once came over to the house to play toy soldiers with me. In my own war games, I would spend hours setting out and positioning my armies and would carefully deliberate over which soldier would die and how. Conrad's approach was more direct. We were each positioned at opposite ends of the room with a single line of toy soldiers in front of each of us. These were a hodgepodge of everything that Conrad could find in my toy chest, including Civil War soldiers, cowboys, American Indians, modern soldiers, etc., Combat consisted of throwing building blocks, toy cars, shoes, or whatever else was handy, at the other guy's line of soldiers until none were left standing. Needless to say, I was less than amused by Conrad's apocalyptic vision of Armageddon.

On the wall in the living room at Ma Hoffman's farm there was a framed plaque containing some saccharin words about sacrifice and liberty. The background consisted of a silhouette outlining soldiers in wash-basin helmets peering over the barbed wire of a trench. In the upper left-hand corner there was a sepia-toned photograph of a young man. This was Selma's older brother, Ervin Heins, who had been killed at St. Mihiel during the Meuse-Argonne offensive in late 1918 – a son of that centenarian who would die a half century later in that same room on the bed behind the piano. Old Anton had been upset when Ervin and his brother Wallace were drafted, since he also had nephews who were serving in the German Army. When the third son, Paul, was also called up, Anton took the train to Madison to plead with the draft board for his deferment, arguing that he could not run the farm alone. I wonder how many of Selma's grandchildren ever bothered to read the plaque or ask about the young man in the photograph.

After Selma's death, her relatives discovered a spiral notebook in which, as an elderly woman, she had written down what she could remember of her brother and the circumstances surrounding his death. He had been killed on the evening of 10 November 1918, a little over 12 hours before the Armistice went into effect. The family, however, was not notified of his death until December. Anton was cutting straw from stock in the barn when he was approached by a neighbor, who told him rather cryptically in German that "Ervin hatte ungluck gehabt." Anton got the hint and drove his cutter into Lyndhurst that evening to pick up the official telegram.

In my day Lyndhurst, Wisconsin, barely qualified as a village, let alone as a town. There was a single main road with a deserted rail road track on one side and four business buildings and about a dozen houses on the other. Of the businesses, only the tavern – in true Wisconsin fashion – was still functioning. My brother's wife actually grew up in one of the houses and for a time my aunt Kathy lived in an apartment above one of the empty store fronts. It was to Lyndhurst that Ervin's body was finally shipped in March of 1919, nearly five months after his death. It was accompanied by a single soldier acting as an honor guard. When he signed for the body, Anton was told that the family was not to open the coffin nor to place it inside the house for purposes of a wake. Anton put it in the tool shed and then, ignoring the order, he, Wallace, Paul and a neighbor proceeded to open it. The corpse was wrapped in a blanket with Ervin's identification number stenciled on it, but beyond that, as might well be imagined, not much was identifiable after five months. However, from the high forehead and aquiline nose – two characteristic Heins' traits – the men satisfied themselves that the body was probably that of Ervin. The women refused to look.

The youngest son, Paul, eventually made contact with a man named Herman Martin, who lived in the nearby city of Shawano and who had served in the same unit as Ervin. He related that, on the night



of 9 November 1918, he and Ervin had slept, along with the rest of their company, in a shed near the front and that Ervin had shown him a \$40.00 watch that he had purchased as a gift for Anton. On the evening of the 10th, while on patrol, both men were hit with shrapnel from the same shell – Martin in the hip and Ervin in the head. Before passing out in the mud beside Ervin, Martin heard him ask for help in removing his pack. He then emitted a sigh, rolled over and died. Forty years later, Selma would scribble in her notebook, “We never had a gold star in the window, never went to meetings honoring the dead. To this day I can’t take it.”

Shortly afterwards the family underwent a religious crisis which eventually led to their conversion to Mormonism – at least in the case of Selma and her siblings. In the case of Anton, I have my doubts. I find it very hard to believe that the elderly blind man that I met a half century later in the bed behind the piano would have known a *Book of Mormon* if it had hit him on the head. He was a fire and brimstone, Bible-thumping Lutheran if ever I met one. In any case, the conversion process was accompanied by visions and miracles. One evening Ervin appeared to Anton and his wife in a dream and reassured them. Thinking back to the evening of 10 November 1918, the family also dimly recalled that strange things had happened – events which became more detailed and definite with each retelling. Selma and her sisters had just gone to bed when a sharp knock had sounded on the kitchen door. They clearly heard their mother call for the person to come in, but no one answered and, on investigation, no one was found at the door. The knocking occurred twice more that evening and the dogs had fussed all night. Selma, of course, had no doubt as to the true meaning of these reconstructed events and would go to her own grave in the firm conviction that, after his fashion, Ervin had indeed come home from the war.

Though I learned of these stories only after Selma’s death, I do recall her telling me how panic had spread throughout the German-

American farming community when rumors came that a German-American family on the Upper Peninsula had been killed in a shoot out with a local sheriff and a group of “patriotic” vigilantes. The family’s sons had refused to register for the draft and the sheriff had gone out to the farm to take them into custody, but things had unfortunately gotten out of hand.

In many ways, the Heins family was lucky to have received a body at all. The reality for many was far grimmer, as related in Hervey Allen’s account of the fate of the men that participated in the assault on Hill 204 near Chateau-Thierry in July of 1918:

*Wyke had also found the bodies of the dead from the platoons of A and B companies which made the attack on the hill... His was one of the most painful stories I ever listened to; we had both known the men intimately. They had been unburied for about two weeks, but lay [in the hot July sun] just as they had fallen, some evidently trying to help a wounded comrade. One man, a fine young bank clerk, who had kept our company books for us beautifully at Camp Hancock, had been killed after being wounded. He first sat up to try and dress his wounds. Others had been shredded by shrapnel beyond all recognition, and all were in terrible condition. The flesh had adhered to the identification tags which were corroded white, and hard to read. They smelled dreadfully in the envelope in which my friend delivered them to me. The folly of thinking that all the dead of the AEF could be brought home is too ghastly to be laughable, even in its extreme nonsense.*

Probably the only reason the body was shipped home at all was because Ervin had died so close to the end of the war. In fact, most the more than 85,000 Americans killed on the Western Front are buried in France. The American cemetery at Romagnes-sous-Montfaucon alone contains over 14,240 bodies and is larger than the American cemetery containing the dead from the Normandy invasion 27 years later –

though, unlike the Normandy site, it is now seldom visited by American tourists.

The touching book, *Fields of Memory*, by Roze and Foley, which deals with the cemeteries and war memorials of World War I still to be seen in Europe, also contains a sobering reminder of how much our cultural expectations have changed since then. After the Vietnam War there were roughly 2,550 American soldiers unaccounted for and listed as either unreturned prisoners of war (POW) or as missing in action (MIA). Angry and insistent demands by relatives and veterans groups that all of these men be accounted for dragged on for decades after the close of the war and consumed vast amounts of time and money on part of the government and congress. Most of the World War I memorials in Europe contain not only cemeteries but also ossuaries in which are found the bones and names of the unidentified men whose remains were eventually dug from the mud of no man's land. The figures are staggering by today's standards:

<i>Hartmannweilertopf</i>
12,000 MIAs
<i>Notre-Dame-de-Lorette</i>
20,000 MIAs
<i>Douaumont</i>
130,000 MIAs
<i>Thiepval</i>
73,000 MIAs
<i>Meinen Gate</i>
54,896 MIAs

Not only were World War I veterans still plentiful, an occasional survivor of the preceding generation could also be found. When I was in Junior High School, a mother of one of my friends made a trip back to Marshfield to pick up some family heirlooms from one of her great

aunts, and my friend and I went along. The aunt lived in one of the most perfect specimens of an early 20th-century bungalow I have ever seen. The great uncle was also still alive but could no longer walk. He was kept on the sun porch, in what looked like a large baby crib, so that he could watch the birds in the back yard. He was in his middle 80s and, despite his lack of mobility, seem to otherwise be in excellent health. This man was a veteran of the Spanish-American War of 1898. He allowed my friend and myself to spend the afternoon in his basement den while the women conducted their business upstairs. There, in the leather-cushioned Morris chairs, we poured through his scrapbooks and other war memorabilia and examined the framed photographs of his unit that hung on the walls.

If one looked closely enough, there were also remnants of even older generations – generations no longer represented by the living. On Central Avenue in Marshfield, just beyond the Consumer's Store, there was an old brick bar which dated from 1889. On the brick along one side of the building there was a sign painted in faded Gothic lettering which read, "Sanger Hall Hauptquartier der Deutschen Krieger." How Marshfield Wisconsin ever managed to attract a sufficient number of German war veterans (presumably of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871) to form a choral society is a complete mystery to me.

## XII

### Au Naturelle

**Regrettably**, my personal memories of my grandfather are not all that pleasant. I mostly remember him as a gruff, unapproachable, and somewhat frightening old man. This may in part be the fault of my father. Like most children, I was a finicky eater and carried on a constant war of attrition with my mother over what I would or would not eat. Lacking a dog or a cat, the favorite evasion was to sneak the undesirable food onto one of the support boards under the kitchen table, where my mother would not discover it until the next day. Though I was regaled with stories about millions starving in Europe and Asia or about not having enough to eat during the great depression, they fell on deaf and unsympathetic ears. However, each time we were invited to eat at my grandparents, my father would remind me in no uncertain terms that similar behavior was not tolerated by my grandfather and would recount for me horror stories of how he as a child had been forced to stay at the table for hours until he finished eating the food on his plate or how his nose had been held and he had been force-fed when he had refused to eat his oatmeal.

Consequently, meals at my grandparents were always a source of anxiety to me, as I lived in constant fear of making the mistake of taking something on my plate which I would not like and of having my grandfather swoop down on me to inflict one of his medieval culinary tortures. The world's starving millions might fail to move me but my own impending doom was a different matter all together. Luckily, the cuisine at my grandparents was not particularly exotic and, save for a raspberry-flavored pudding called "Rodgrod" or "Danish Dessert," which I actually liked, I do not remember anything distinctly Scandinavian about it. My grandmother also soon discovered

that I was quite fond of her chicken, which she made with basil leaves in a pressure cooker, and she usually contrived to serve it whenever we visited, along with the small, red-skinned potatoes that my grandfather grew each year in his backyard garden. Though, as a result, I was never forced to test the truth of my father's horror stories, my brother insists that he did and recalls a two-hour session with my grandfather at the dining room table long after the cousins and uncles had retreated to the living room and the women to the kitchen. As a passing note, I discovered a box of Danish Dessert in the grocery store many years later and had my wife prepare some. She, however, found it so vile that she refused to ever make it again and it has been nearly 20 years since I have tasted it.

My strongest memory of my grandfather is so bizarre that I hesitate to record it, especially as I am sure that those of a Freudian persuasion will find it fraught with hidden psychological meanings. I must have been four or five years old at the time. There was a family reunion at my grandparents and everyone was staying at the house. I had been put to bed with my cousins on the living room floor, but through the darkened dining room I could see the light in the kitchen where my mother, grandmother, and aunts were still visiting and cleaning up after the evening meal. I wanted my mother for some reason or other. However, even at that age I was already something of a prude and was afraid to get up and go to the kitchen to get her because I had been put to bed in my underwear and was too shy to appear that way in front of my aunts and grandmother. Consequently, I began to fuss in an attempt to attract her attention and to get her to come to me instead. My grandparents' bedroom was located directly off the living room and was separated from it by a curtain on a rod rather than a door. Though I failed to attract my mother's attention, I did attract my grandfather, who came storming out of the bedroom. He slapped me on the side of the head and told me to shut up and go to sleep.

Like most children, I had a well-defined code as to who had the right to yell at me or to punish me and who did not. Punishments which I would accept without question from my parents were viewed as personal outrages if administered by another adult, and my grandfather most certainly fell into the latter category. But that was not the worst of it. When he stormed out of the bedroom my grandfather had on only his undershirt. He was stark naked from the waist down, his wrinkled butt in full view and his private parts waving in the wind. After slapping me, he proceeded to walk in this condition across the darkened dining room, past the kitchen full of talking women, to the bathroom at the other end. I was appalled. I had been too shy to appear in my underwear and here was my grandfather stomping around the house virtually *au naturelle*! Though I suspect that his rather nonchalant behavior in this regard merely reflected his semi-rural European upbringing, it went well beyond my childish sense of propriety – or perhaps it was simply that I was so pissed that he had hit me.

Even though I was twelve when my grandfather died, I cannot remember whether he had an accent. Since he did not learn English until after he came to the United States, and therefore not until he was in his late teens, it would seem highly likely that he had one. Yet even my mother, who knew him far longer than I, could not recall what it sounded like. One of my maternal uncles told me that it was nothing like the typical Scandinavian accent used on television and in the movies, but rather sounded like a cross between German and “Brooklynese.” The most probable reason for this massive amnesia was supplied by my uncle Harold, who told me that my grandfather had only a slight accent but that the family “was so used to hearing it that we never thought about it.” None of my aunts and uncles ever learned Danish and my grandparents only spoke it when they “didn’t want the kids to know what they were saying.”

Like most immigrants of his generation, my grandfather wanted

to be as American as possible. Not only did he take care to minimize his accent, he also officially changed his name on his citizenship papers from Jørgen Christian Jensen to Chris Jørgen Jensen and was always called “Chris” by my grandmother and by his friends and family. Indeed, this preference for his middle name dated from his childhood as letters from his mother and sisters in Denmark were always addressed to “Kjaere Kristian.”

Since my grandfather worked a five and a half-day week, or longer – if problems at the sawmill required it – he had little time left over for hobbies and outside interests. Most of his effort was spent in providing for his family and in improving his house. On Sunday afternoons he liked to go for a drive in the country to see how the crops were doing, and during baling season he sometimes earned extra money by repairing the heavy ropes used by the local farmers to transfer the hay from the wagons to the barn lofts. He had apparently learned the art of rope splicing as a teenager in Denmark from the local fishermen. The farmers around the Nasonville area were undoubtedly aware of this unique skill as a result of my grandfather’s earlier employment on the Ebbe and Thompson farms.

When he gained greater seniority at Roddis, he was given a week-long vacation each summer. At least part of this was always devoted to a day trip to some scenic lake or park area and included a large picnic lunch prepared by my grandmother. His favorite site was the Chain O’ Lakes camping area at King, Wisconsin, near Waupaca, where his half-brother Carl lived. My uncle Harold remembered these trips as “special” and they continued until they were interrupted by the Second World War. Beyond this, however, activities and hobbies were severely limited by a “shortage of money ... and if it wasn’t necessary, it wasn’t done.”

A large floor-model Philco radio stood against one wall of the living room and, prior to the advent of television, my grandfather would listen to Amos and Andy each evening at ten. I also dimly



recall that he enjoyed a country-western music program which originated somewhere in Canada and can remember as a child standing in the corner of the living room by the door to the upstairs and entertaining him by doing my six-year old's version of a jig or tap dance in time with the music.

However, my strongest memory is of my grandfather, my father, and my uncles sitting around in their sleeveless undershirts drinking beer and listening to the baseball game on the radio, and later, with the coming of the television set, to football and to the Friday night fights. With the passage of time, the texture of all of these sporting events has become condensed into a single scenario in my mind. I am sitting in the shade of the screened front porch of my grandparents' home in Marshfield. Beyond the shadow of the porch it is always Sunday afternoon and always hot, with the sunlight so intense that it nearly blinds you and the air filled with ripples of heat radiating off the sidewalk. But mostly I remember the boredom and the sense of being trapped – Sunday afternoon, nothing open, nowhere to go, no cousins or neighbor kids to play with, and too hot to venture out into the sunlight beyond the porch.

I would sit in the striped-cloth lawn chairs and play with the old deck of cards from the drawer of the beat up library table that my grandparents kept on the porch. Occasionally I would stare at the metal thermometer nailed to one of the porch posts. This had a painting of a Vargas pin-up girl stamped on it. It was explained to me that her none-too-ample dress was supposed to change color every time it was going to rain – apparently it was painted with cobalt chloride or some such humidity-sensitive chemical – but I always watched in vain. Try as I might, I could never detect a change – in part, I suppose, because I'm partially color blind, but more likely because most of the chemical had long since been washed away or oxidized.

In the background of this recollection there is always the

relentless din of that Sunday afternoon baseball broadcast – the continuous artificial chit-chat of the radio announcers, that characteristic muffled roaring that the crowds in the stands made each time someone hit the ball, and, of course, the short bursts of organ music and the endless beer commercials. To this day I cannot stand being in a room where someone is listening to a sports event, whether on the radio or on television. With Pavlovian certainty, it always brings back those hot, endless Sunday afternoons of being trapped, of being bored senseless, and I'm overcome with a frantic need to get up and leave.

In fairness, I should point out that, as children, our visits to our grandparents were not always boring. There were four male cousins grouped within one or two years of my brother and myself and, when their visits coincided with our own, it was quite exciting. There was an empty corner lot next to my grandparents' house. In my father's day it had been the scene of nightly ball games during the summer, but with my brother and cousins it became a maze of forts and secret tunnels marked out by matting down the long grass. These served as the terrain for many a game of "Cowboys and Indians" and "Hide and Seek." Maple Street paralleled lower Central Avenue, which served as Marshfield's main business street, and was separated from it by a short city block. Prior to the 1960s, the business district thinned out as one approached the outskirts of town, but in the late 1960s and 1970s this distribution reversed and the resulting cancer of fast food places, used car lots, and laundromats began to spread from Central Avenue to Maple Street. Though my grandparents' house still stands, the neighborhood has been largely destroyed by the encroaching business district.

Visits to the Jensen grandparents also suffered by comparison with visits to my maternal grandparents. My father was a younger child of a late marriage, whereas my mother was the oldest child of an early marriage. Consequently my mother's parents were over a decade younger than my father's parents. Whereas my paternal aunt and

uncles were all married and had left home, my youngest maternal aunt and uncle were still in high school and junior high school, respectively, and kept my brother and me well entertained whenever we visited. Conditions at my maternal grandparent's home still made allowance for children, whereas at my paternal grandparent's home they were arranged for the benefit of the adults. Though my paternal grandparents owned an early television set, I do not remember being allowed to watch any children's programs. When the TV was on, it was usually tuned to the news or to some sporting event of interest to the adults. I used to wait longingly for the occasional Hamm's Beer and Gillette Razor commercials that punctuated the Friday night fights. Thirty-second flashes of their cartoon bears and parrots served as my substitute for the Saturday morning cartoon shows.

## XIII

### Parents and Siblings

AS a child I was only dimly aware of my grandfather's family background. I knew about his mother and father back in Denmark because a large oval portrait of them hung above my grandmother's pedal-driven Singer sewing machine in the upstairs hallway. This showed my great grandfather, Morten Jensen, who looked like an aged and diminutive version of General Grant, standing behind a chair on which my great grandmother, Rasmine, is seated. Standing in front of her is an aged and overfed mongrel house dog. They are posed in front of the entrance to their cottage in Nebbe. Only the front door, the surrounding ivy-covered arbor, and part of the thatched roof are visible. One post of the arbor is broken half way up as though it had been kicked by a horse or nicked by a passing wagon. As a child this defect always bothered me. I could not understand why they would sit for a formal photograph using such a shabby background.

When I became older, I would pour through the album containing photographs and snapshots sent to my grandfather by his relatives in Denmark. Most of them were unlabeled and, in any case, I had only a dim understanding of how the people pictured in them were related to my grandfather. Long after his death, I went through the album again with my grandmother, who, with unerring accuracy, as subsequent genealogical research has confirmed, identified most of them for me. The majority of photographs were from my grandfather's favorite sister, Anine, who had married a man with the quintessential Danish name of Hans Peter Christensen, and showed her children and grandchildren. Others showed his older brother Alfred and family; and his sister, Sine, who though married to a man named Valdemar Pelsen, had remained childless. When I was 13 or 14, I had a mild "photo-

graphic crush” on Anine’s daughter, Inge, who was quite striking in appearance. Had I bothered to do a little math, I would have realized that I was mooning over outdated photographs of a girl who, at the time, was already a 50-year old woman with children. Indeed, unknown to the family in America, she would die the next year (1962) at age 51.

Undoubtedly, the aunts, uncles, and cousins in Denmark also remained photographic abstractions for my father’s generation. Even in the case of the aunts and uncles who had immigrated, the interaction was largely formal. The large age gap separating my grandfather from both his oldest sister, Jennie, and his half-brother, Carl – coupled with my grandfather’s late marriage – meant that most of the cousins on the Peterson and Frederiksen side were much older than my father and his siblings and thus did not play with them as children. Indeed, neither my aunt nor my surviving uncle can recall ever hearing my grandfather talk about his family or his childhood back in Denmark.

Nevertheless, I can dimly remember a visit from my great uncle Carl. He appears in my memory as a very elderly, shabbily-dressed man, with two or three days worth of stubble on his face, who sat in my grandparent’s living room clutching his cane and telling horror stories about the last days of even older relatives who had made the mistake of trusting their lives to doctors and hospitals. On at least one occasion, I was also taken by my mother to visit my great aunt Jennie, who by then was living with one of her daughters just up the street from my grandparent’s house. When we arrived, the daughter was in the process of cleaning up after a coffee klatsch with a group of friends during which they had been experimenting with an Ouija board. I thought that it was some kind of toy board game and asked my mother about it. She explained that it was a device used to talk to dead spirits and ghosts and that, as good Mormons, we were expressly forbidden to have anything to do with such things. This so intrigued my eight-year old mind, that it is the only thing about the visit I can

*My Paternal Grandfather*

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recall and, consequently, I cannot even remember what my great aunt looked like – that same great aunt who had come to town so many years before to fetch my freshly-arrived, 17-year old, grandfather from the city jail.



*Figure 53.* The siblings who remained behind, c. 1930. My grandfather's sisters Anine (standing center) and Sine (sitting on the far right). To Anine's right is her husband Hans Peter Christensen and to Sine's right is her husband Valdemar Pelsen. Also present in the back row are Anine's children, Hans, Helmer and Inge and her daughter-in-law. The two girls sitting to the left of Sine are Anine's grandchildren.



*Figure 54.* The siblings who remained behind. My grandfather's brother Alfred married quite late in life and then only after his mother's death. He is shown in this snapshot with his wife Anna and only child, Elly, outside the house in Nebbe, c. 1947.



*Figure 55.* The siblings who immigrated. Standing on the right is my grandfather's half-brother, Carl Fredericksen; sitting on the left is his oldest sister, Jennie Jensen. The occasion is Jennie's marriage in 1900 to Otto Peterson, who is sitting on the right. The woman standing next to Carl is Otto's sister, Lena Peterson.

*Figure 56.* My grandfather's parents, Morten and Rasmine Jensen, posing outside their home at Nebbe. My grandfather had this photo enlarged and mounted in an oval gold frame which hung above my grandmother's pedal driven sewing machine at the head of the stairs in their home in Marshfield.





## References and Notes

1. All genealogical data are from W. B. Jensen, *A Pictorial Genealogy of William Wickman Jensen*, Zoa Press: Gresham, WI, 1987 and H. T. Jensen, N. M. Jensen, *Genealogy of Morten and Rasmine Jensen: Ancestors and Descendants*, La Crosse, WI, 1997.

2. Historical and geographical data on Langeland, Tranekaer, and Marshfield are from *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed., The Encyclopaedia Britannica Co: New York, NY, 1910, Vol. 8, pp. 23-24 (Denmark), Vol. 17, p. 773 (Marshfield). Photos and descriptions of the current condition of the houses in Tranekaer and Nebbe were provided by my second cousin, Michael Winkler.

3. Background information on Danish immigration to Wisconsin is taken from F. Hale, *Danes in Wisconsin*, State Historical Society of Wisconsin: Madison, WI, 1981.

4. General information on World War I is taken from S. L. A. Marshall, *World War I*, American Heritage Press: New York, NY, 1965; D. Eggenberger, *An Encyclopedia of Battles*, Dover: New York, NY, 1985; M. Harries, S. Harries, *The Last Days of Innocence: America at War, 1917-1918*, Random House: New York, NY, 1997; N. Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, Basic Books: New York, NY, 1998; and G. Mead, *Doughboys: America and the First World War*, Overlook Press: Woodstock, NY, 2000; A. Roze, J. Foley, *Fields of Memory: A Testimony to the Great War*, Cassell: London, 1998.

5. Information on the activities of the 32nd Division is taken from my grandfather's copies of C. King et al., *The 32nd Division in the World War*, Wisconsin War History Commission: Madison, WI, 1920; and W. G. Haan et al., *In Commemoration of the Foreign Service and Home Celebration of the 32nd Division*, Harding-Coolidge Club of Wisconsin: Milwaukee, WI, 1919.

6. The details of the history of my grandfather's artillery regiment and battery are taken from the anonymous but detailed account given in his personal copy of *Reunion Souvenir: First Annual Reunion of the 32nd Division ("Les Terribles")*, 121st Field Artillery Veteran's Association: Milwaukee, WI., September 18-21, 1920.

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7. All data on the great war are from my grandfather's copy of W. E. Moore, J. C. Russell, *U. S. Official Pictures of the World War*, Pictorial Bureau: Washington, DC, 1920 and from Marshall (4). Curiously, Eggenberger (4) claims (p. 478) that 115,000 Americans died in the First World War – a nearly 100% increase over the official figures reported by Moore and Russell in 1920.

8. A transcription of Selma Hoffman's notebook was provided by my cousin, Jennifer Hoffman.

9. Additional personal accounts of combat were taken from H. Allen, *Toward the Flame*, Doran: New York, NY, 1924; C. MacArthur, *War Bugs*, Doubleday & Doran: Garden City, NY, 1929; and from the interview with Earl Goldsmith which appeared in H. Berry, *Make the Kaiser Dance*, Doubleday: Garden City, New York, NY, 1978, pp. 273-285.