15 days in the Meuse-Argonne Forest

‘Hurry up and wait’ seemed the command for wet and weary GIs

The next morning the regiment was all formed in the hollow square. First came our fighting colonel who had led us out of the first Argonne and as reward for his valor had been authorized to put on the silver leaf. He addressed himself more particularly to the new men telling them of the good work that the regiment had done in Cantigney, Soissons, and the first Argonne, cited cases where men single-handed had captured machine guns with their crews of gunners, reviewed the record of the division, and boasted that we had never lost a foot of ground we had taken. In short, he made a good effort to put into the new men’s heads the things they were up against in coming to an old and war battered outfit, and what they would have to do to live up to the record of the past.

Then adroitly and with an easy manner of speech came our new brigade commander. He told about how in his idle dreams he had hoped for a command in the First Division, but had thought his chances so slim that he had never dared breathe his aspirations to G.H.Q. And on the other hand, besides being almost overjoyed at his assignment to us, he who had all his military career been an officer of cavalry could learn a great deal from his association with the doughboys. It all seemed rather frank to the doughboys — such straight from the shoulder talk — but those who knew men, and were used to handling them, rather judged him to be born a diplomat and commander.

The command “at ease” was given and everyone waited to see what would come next. There was the noise which came up and stopped in the hedge next to the road. Someone saw three stars, then there was a medley of bugles, a chaos of human voices all giving the same command, and the regiment stood stiff as starch for the corps commander.

“At EASE!” he commanded as he came into the arena and then began his speech.

“What is all this talk,” asked one of the new men who had just come from the States and 15 days in the Meuse-Argonne Forest

‘Hurry up and wait’ seemed the command for wet and weary GIs

Prison life made him tougher

David Lydall Hardee was born in the area of what is now part of the Camp Butner Military Reservation in Granville County, North Carolina, on 16 September 1890 to Dr. Parrott Rastus Hardee and Roberta Buford Bacon Hardee. He graduated from Stem High School in 1909 and from Trinity College in 1911. Following graduation, he worked for the Atlantic Coast Realty Company before becoming a public relations officer for Wachovia Bank and Trust Company of Winston-Salem in 1914 and continuing with the bank until December 1917.

Having previously registered with the Selective Service on 5 June 1917, Hardee enlisted in the army on 28 January 1918, joining Company H, 61st Infantry, 5th Division. He shipped out with the 61st Infantry to France on 1 April 1918 and joined the 28th Infantry.
BIOGRAPHY  Colonel David L. Hardee  
Continued from page 1

1st Division, on 1 September 1918.

While overseas, Hardee rose through the ranks from private to corporal to sergeant before being commissioned as a second lieutenant in Langres, France, on 1 October 1918. Hardee participated in the Anould Sub-Sector (defensive action), the St. Die Sector (defensive action), and the Meuse-Argonne and Meuzon-Sedan offensive. He received his first Silver Star for gallantry during the Meuse-Argonne offensive from 1-12 October 1918. He received a second Silver Star for actions near Exermont, France, on 8 October 1918, and a third near Chavenges, France, on 9 October 1918.

Promotion followed gallantry, and Hardee rose to first lieutenant on 25 October 1918 (accepted 1 November 1918; later promoted to first lieutenant in the regular army on 1 July 1920).

Following the Armistice, he served in the Army of Occupation in Germany at the Coblenz Bridgehead.

Hardee returned home on 4 September 1919 and participated in the victory parades in New York City and Washington, DC. Remaining in the army, he was stationed with the 28th Infantry at Camp Zachary Taylor in Kentucky, and he served as a recruiting officer for the First Division’s North Carolina recruiting drive in 1920, receiving a commendation for his work from division commander Major General Charles P. Summerall. Upon graduation from the Infantry School at Fort Benning, GA, Hardee served at Fort Ontario and Plattsburg, NY.

On 5 October 1922 in Salisbury, NC, he married Elizabeth Neely Henry (born 26 August 1888 in Charlotte). From 1923 to 1924, Hardee became the first non-aviator to graduate from the Air Corps Tactical School, Langley Field, VA. Following graduation, he went to Fort Sam Houston, TX, before returning to Fort Benning as an instructor at the Infantry School, teaching air corps tactics to infantry personnel as a member of the 24th Infantry, the first of its kind for ground service schools and a model for future course development. At Fort Benning, his daughter, Elizabeth Frances, was born on 20 May 1927.

On 12 September 1929, Hardee and his family moved to the Philippines where he served with the 31st Infantry in the Cuartel de España in Manila. His second daughter, Mary Lucile, was born in Sternberg General Hospital, Manila, on 20 December 1931.

In February 1932, Hardee and the regiment shipped out to Shanghai, China, to guard a section of the International Settlement, returning to Manila in July. For his involvement, Hardee received the Yangtze Service Medal awarded by the Commandant of the Marine Corps on 13 March 1935.

Hardee returned to the United States on 20 July 1932 and served at Fort Howard, MD, until 1934 with the 12th Infantry. After his promoted to captain on 22 October 1944, the Army ordered Hardee to Winston-Salem on 1 November 1934 where he served as instructor of organized reserves for the 322nd Infantry in Winston-Salem until 15 August 1938. Hardee next received orders to move to Oak Ridge, NC, and serve as Professor of Military Science and Tactics at Oak Ridge Military Institute. Promoted to major on 1 July 1940, Hardee and his family enjoyed their time in Oak Ridge until 1941. Then, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt declared a national emergency in 1941, Hardee received orders to report to Camp Wheeler, Macon, GA, on 15 May to train new recruits in the fundamentals of infantry tactics.

On 17 September 1941, Hardee was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel, and a week later was advised that General Douglas MacArthur selected Hardee and other officers to sail to Manila to assist in the organization and training of ten new Filipino divisions. On 1 November 1941, Hardee bid goodbye to his family in Durham, NC, and the United States as he sailed off on the SS President Coolidge to the Philippines once more.

Arriving on 21 November, he had little time to get to work before the Japanese attack on 8 December. Initially attached to the headquarters, United States Army Force in the Far East (USAFFE), Hardee handled a series of jobs for Major General Richard K. Sutherland, Chief of Staff for General Douglas MacArthur, in the initial weeks of fighting. On 26 January 1942, Hardee was made executive officer of the Provisional Air Corps Regiment under the command of Colonel Irvin E. Doane.

Hardee and the regiment would remain on the front lines for 73 consecutive days, withstanding countless attacks by artillery, heavy bombers, and infantry. In the course of the fighting, Hardee received a Purple Heart for wounds sustained in action on 9 April 1942 near Cabacabin, Philippines, a Bronze Star for meritorious service near Orion and Lemay, Bataan, on 7 April 1942, and a fourth Silver Star near Orion, Bataan, on 7 April 1942. For extraordinary heroism from 7-8 April 1942, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross (he did not receive the award until 9 October 1949).

After months of desperate fighting for Manila, Corregidor, and Bataan, Hardee surrendered with the remaining American forces at Bataan on 9 April 1942. Taken prisoner on 10 April 1942, Hardee would spend the next 34 months, until 4 February 1945, in Japanese captivity.

Hardee’s prisoner of war ordeal began with the Bataan Death March to Camp O’Donnell, the site of his...
The Japanese moved Hardee and other American prisoners to the Cabanatuan Prisoner of War Camp, where he arrived on 6 June 1942 and stayed until 26 October. The Japanese next shipped Hardee to the Davao Penal Colony (Davecopol) on Mindanao on or about 8-9 November 1942 aboard the Japanese “Hell Ship” Erie Maru. At Davecopol, Hardee worked as an agricultural worker harvesting coffee until he suffered a serious hernia which would cause him constant pain and suffering until his liberation. Hardee credited the hernia will possibly saving his life.

While in the prison hospital, other groups of lieutenant colonels were shipped out of the camp on “Hell Ships,” unmarked vessels that fell victim to American submarines. On 6 June 1944, Hardee was moved with other prisoners to the port of Lasang where the prisoners were herded like cattle into the holds of the Yashy Maru on 12 June, and after a stop in Cebu and transfer to the Singoto Maru No. 824, Hardee left for Manila on 22 June. There the prisoners were transferred to Bilibid Prison in late June-early July, located within the northern sector of the city. It was here that American forces liberated Hardee and other American prisoners of war on 4 February 1945.

During his imprisonment, Hardee was beaten in captivity on multiple occasions by Japanese prison guards and suffered the severe hernia in March 1943 while picking coffee. The hernia was not fully repaired until February 1950. Malnutrition was a constant problem, and in captivity he lost approximately 70 pounds from his normal body weight of 185 pounds. In addition, Hardee dealt off and on with instances of dysentery, beriberi, and pellagra. He was witness to several incidents of murder and torture of American prisoners by their Japanese guards, as well as several successful prison escapes. One escape, by Captain Damon J. “Rocky” Gause, brought word in November 1942 that Hardee was alive and in captivity. Upon liberation in February 1945, he was promoted to the rank of colonel on 16 March, and he returned to the United States aboard the Cape Meares on 12 May. Technically he was promoted to full colonel on 7 April 1942, but the orders were never relayed to him due to the confusion in the final days of fighting.

Following a period of convalescent leave and medical treatment for his hernia at the Walter Reed General Hospital in July 1945, he served the remainder of his time in the army as an instructor and advisor in the Adjutant General’s Office for the North Carolina National Guard from July 1946 until his retirement from the army on 31 December 1949.

After his time in the army, Hardee kept active. From 1950 to 1953, he organized and served as president of the ready-mix Hardee Concrete Company in Durham. He sold the company in 1954 when he took the position as Civil Defense director for Wake County and Raleigh on 1 March 1954, a position he held until his resignation from the post on 1 July 1961.

From 1957 to 1958, Hardee served as the national commander for the Army and Navy Legion of Valor. In 1966, he published the book, The Eastern North Carolina Hardy-Hardee Family in the South and Southwest, a genealogical history of his family.

Hardee died in Raleigh on 23 November 1969 at the age of 79 and is buried in New Maplewood Cemetery in Durham.

During his military career, Hardee received numerous decorations for service and valor. These include the Distinguished Service Cross, the Silver Star with three oak leaf clusters, the Bronze Star, the Purple Heart, a Combat Infantryman Badge, Presidential Citation with two oak leaf clusters, the World War I Victory Medal with one bronze battle clasp and defensive sector clasp, Army of Occupation of Germany Medal, the Yangtze Service Medal, American Defense Service Medal with foreign service clasp, Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with two bronze service stars, Philippine Liberation Medal with one bronze star, Philippine Presidential Unit Citation, and Army Distinguished Unit Citation with two oak leaf clusters. He is posthumously eligible for the Prisoner of War Medal.
the basin, and capture more than half of his forces. With the idea in mind that we are going to break through, and we are, we are going to attack in echelons two brigades in depth, that is one brigade behind another so that when once the hostile resistance is shattered the advance elements may continue to advance without being in danger of being outflanked. We hope by pursuing these tactics to carry the war back into the enemy territory and thus close the greatest of all wars on the soil where it originated.

“What do you think of that,” one of the new men put in.

“Oh, it’s just his usual barrage. Wait till you know him like I do, and then you can judge for yourself, but this talk of going in two brigades deep does sound like breaking through,” replied the old veteran.

* * *

Dark that night found us emerging from our cover in the Bois de Parios and in column of twos making our way slowly over the fields, through the woods on little narrow trails, trudging through the mud to take position somewhere, no one asked and those old at the game did not care. For there is one thing the war learns a man. That is never to worry about tomorrow, but just take care of today, and the best do well in such times to take care of the present hour. Midnight found us in the middle of the old Hindenburg line, where not a living thing was left to gaze upon. It took an old shattered bridge over which we had trouble with transportation to remind us that we were human beings, so ghastly was the midnight scene. But it lasted for only a few minutes. No man’s land was not very wide there, and soon we were again among trees, on good roads and among living things that had escaped the fury of the Allied artillery.

Morning found us snoring peacefully in a wet foggy woods on the forward side, while on the reverse slope the constant roar of our guns, and the swish-swish-swish of the shells overhead shattered the advance elements may continue to advance without being in danger of being outflanked. We hope by pursuing these tactics to carry the war back into the enemy territory and thus close the greatest of all wars on the soil where it originated.

“It was almost a case of trust to luck and see how it would come out.

An hour of struggling brought us to the place we were to cross the road and take a less traveled fork leading off to the left in the direction of the woods we were destined for. Here a couple of mounted officers had to act as mounted police and hold up the traffic for a couple of minutes while one platoon rushed the crossing, and then let the traffic have its way for a few minutes before putting the next platoon across. The regiments in the parade had become mixed during the jams, and one can imagine how long it takes to work a brigade across such a space only one platoon every five minutes. All from the regimental commanders down took a hand and worked reliefs, and the wee hours of the morning found the rear units clearing the crossing.

Day broke among us still moving, and, at the command, “Fall out and bivouac!” everyone fell out and it seemed slept all that day and night without stirring. The next morning, chow wagons were up, and so was everyone in the outfit. Another move was eminent, and this time it would be a day move. Why, no one knew. It did seem strange that the nearer we came to the enemy, the more open we became with our movements. We were all in the dark as to the happenings of the great struggle except what little we could see of it with our own eyes, and in our world. The only reading matter that reached us for near a week was march orders, and we kept on marching in a sort of zig zag path across the rear of our corps area.

We did not know then as we do now why the hardships were so hard and the march so strenuous. We were going to points in the rear of the line where it seemed that we were most needed and were being used as a whip to urge on other divisions. If one faltered or failed to take its basic objectives, rumors had it that they were threatened to be relieved and their name would be mud. Other rumors have it that it worked like magic on other division staffs.

Soon we were off again on the big hard road and in the middle of daylight. It seemed rather queer as the men looked up to their left. The big hill looked natural and then several recognized it at once as Hill 263 that we ourselves had taken away from the Boche about three weeks before. We were just on the other side of it where the Marines had “jumped off” two days before and begun the last phase of the Meuse-Argonne drive.

Before us lay Landres-et St. George upon which we had gazed from the top of the hill when it was our front line, and from which we had withstood a counter attack. We approached it down a road that had recently been cleared of huge fallen trees that had been smashed in the twinkling of an eye by direct hits from hundred and fifty-fives and two hundred and tens.

It was a peaceful little burg as we marched through it except for American troops and traffic which jammed its road forks and crossings. On the hill a few hundred yards in
its rear, we approached the boasted Kriemhilde Line on which the American artillery had been laying its recent heavy barrages. The trenches, as shallow as they had been, were practically demolished, the barbed wire wrecked, and the ground so pitted with shell holes that it was hard to carry a column of twos through it, and at many places the machine gunners had to help the wheels of their narrow carts over the craters. DuPont should have the picture of it for what they advertise as intense dynamiting.

Nothing presents a more gruesome aspect than the battlefield for a day or so after. Here were long rows of Huns, there rows of Marines, and in other places rows of Doughboys, with the burial detail still bringing them together to be laid away and marked with the rude cross of wood emblematic of their return to nature, and the esteem in which all of the world holds them. And yet what they had suffered and done was only a part of the price of victory.

Then a little further on were the horses and drivers, and destroyed wagons and guns right where they had fallen. Next we came to the batteries on the reverse slope, and as our barrage had gotten the horses they had to leave the guns, many of which were intact. The gentle reader can picture the battlefield the day after according to any comparison in his experienced, and no matter how gruesome the comparisons, unless he has been there, it is nothing like the mental picture drawn. It appears as if the earth itself has belched up the derelicts of hell.

It was not far, only three or four kilometers, from Landres-et St. George to Landreville, where we spent the night and took position to attack at daybreak. The little town was just on the other edge of what had been the barrage zone, and our position was on the side of a gentle open slope with our rear echelons and kitchens in the edge of a narrow woods which separated us from the little village where the regimental P.C. was located.

The men took cover in little foxholes already prepared by the Boche and spread shelter halves, for another rain was falling, and the continuous carpet of mud was constantly thickening. We had moved from reserve to support, and when we reached the town the front line was less than a kilometer away. The direction of attack was magnetic north, and everything was fixed except the zero hour which was never fixed. We were permitted to sleep well into the morning when the word came that chow had caught up and the cooks and K.P.'s were functioning.

All day it seemed that something was happening. Early in the previous night a few rifle shots could be heard, but now a delightful calm reigned throughout the day, except for a constant turmoil of trucks and transportation hurrying to and from the front, and the steady tramp, tramp, tramp of the prisoners coming back headed by a wounded man or an M.P. Some stopped at the kitchens for a cup of coffee, and an officer, map in hand, interviewed a captured Unteroffizier.

“Hier,” he pointed out. “Ich war gebäuden.” Could it be possible he had been made a prisoner eight or nine kilometers away from the front? Yet that was what he and the map said.

Old man rumor is about the strongest man in this man’s army, and he is especially strong among men who for several days had had no newspapers to check up by. He goes around and smites the doughboy on one cheek and then turns and smites him on the other, and accordingly does the doughboy’s morale go up and down. This time it came to us that the Boche were retreating in motor trucks and the 80th Division had gone over the top after them in motorized machine gun carts. The old man was working good all day as the prisoners poured back.

Late in the afternoon an enraged artillery officer finished a conversation on the telephone and snatched it off the wall calling for a signalman to come and wind up the wire and giving orders for his battery to get ready to move.

“Where are you going?” someone asked.

“Don’t know and don’t give a damn,” he replied. “Just going to push on up the road toward Buzancy. We got here and had the battery all set up to put down a barrage last night, and now the front line has gone off our map.”

We woke up about dark to find ourselves a bunch of muddy, wet, fighting troops, that the night before were within a stone’s throw of the front lines, and now we were almost in the advance section of the S.O.S. Something would be done, and we knew it would be done quickly.

“Lieutenant, Regimental directs that the battalion commander report at once and that the adjutant have the battalion ready to move out in ten minutes,” said the regimental runner. The Adjutant was up from the little goods box which served for a table and astride his horse almost in the twinkling of an eye. One hand held the reins, and the other the cook’s hot cakes dripping with butter and syrup.

A few minutes and we were off again, moving or at least trying to move down a narrow road on which four regiments of infantry, three machine gun battalions, two regiments of artillery, and the trains of two divisions were trying to move down all at the same time. It was a good hour that gained us five hundred yards, and the men standing and waiting and waiting in mud in many places up to their shoe tops, and seventy-five pounds of equipment on their backs, were kidding each other along.

“What outfit?” one would ask.

“Oh! It’s the Y.M.C.A. replacements,” another would reply, and then possibly we would move up a few steps.

In the little village of Bayonville, just evacuated by the Hun the day before, the battalion commander came out of a large house where he had been to consult his map. “We attack at five A.M.,” he said almost breathless, “and how we can get the troops up in position in that time is more than I can see. That was brigade P.C. and I heard them reading the order.”

The town offered a worse problem, for here several roads converged and troops seemed to be coming down all of them and with their transportation were going in traverse directions. At last the adjutant had worked the battalion through the worst jams at the road crossing, with the exception of the rear company which was likely to be cut off and lost at any minute. Then the battalion came to a sudden and sullen halt. At the head of the column he found the commander in a parley with an M.P. Here where it was quiet and hardly needed traffic regulation that insistent individual insisted in holding us up.

“No, there are orders against double parking,” he continued repeating.

By the side of the road was a narrow line of machine gun carts, and to pass them would not jam traffic, but would relieve the crush that was coming from the rear, and would prevent the company behind being lost in the turmoil.

“We have to attack at five o’clock,” put in the Adjutant, “and we are going through right now.”

“See the lieutenant down at M.P. headquarters first,” demand-
ed the sentry.

This was too much for the blood of a fighting man. The bare suggestion of begging a non-combatant to let him take his troops to the front made his blood boil. It was worse than adding injury to insult, and as smooth as the adjutant was, it was here that he lost head and temper at the same time.

“Damn the M.P. Headquarters!” he shouted. “Take my name if you want to; we are going ahead.”

He turned in his saddle, gave a sharp command, and the battalion trudged on in the mud and through the congested traffic toward their goal.

A few minutes before daybreak registered seven kilometers for our night of waiting, laboring, and marching, and the command “fall out” found the men too tired to unroll their packs even if they had been permitted to. A stumble over something in the ditch and a fall into the mud on the road bank established the battalion P.C., where the officers unrolled a shelter half and blanket to find at daybreak that it had been established under a German horse that could not make the hike and was waiting for the burial detail to catch up.

We were in position a second time and the zero hour never came. The day passed there in the Bois de Follie where everyone took cover when an enemy plane approached and began to work his machine guns. A patrol went out to the left for a ways and brought in a machine gun and part of a battery that the enemy had failed to notify of their retirement. They did not know until the patrol approached that they were isolated and practically out of the war.

The day brought back the officers that had gone on leave from the training area and been recalled. They had been promoted and did not know it. A serious-faced, determined captain put on the gold leaves and took command of the battalion.

* * *

The next night we spent in the same place and during the day gathered information on the front and fighting from the prisoners that came pouring back. Some big things were happening fast; we knew not what. All that we knew was that we were trying like the devil to relieve the Second Division and couldn’t catch them. The front line moved so fast and to top it off there were no signs of much fighting.

The early dark found us on the hike again and day broke on us twenty kilometers further north in position again in the woods north of Beaumont ready to attack. We had crossed a slightly shelled area and had one casualty and one officer who was a mother’s pretty boy covered with mud. He had never been under fire before, just over and a casual from the States, and rearing to get into it. The first big shell that burst in a few hundred yards of him caused a commotion in his breast as to prompt him to take cover head first in a mud hole, which connected with the mud on his lower extremities forming one solid cake of human, O.D. goods, Red Cross scarves, and just plain French mud.

“How would you like for mother to see her pretty boy now?” he was asked.

“Not for a million I have in oil,” came the retort. “I am about cured of my desire to see the front. I’ve seen enough,” and he was cured. He had been about much service to his captain and his platoon as a ten-year-old boy. Next day a machine gun bullet gave him his little souvenir on the hand, and he was evacuated and soon en route for the States.

The conversation was hardly finished before his captain broke out a little song, all too true to be poetic:

“It’s not the pack you carry on your back,
Nor the rifle on your shoulder,
Nor the five-inch crush of Bolton County dust
That makes you feel your limbs are growing older.
And it’s not the hike on the hard turnpike
That wipes away your smile,
Nor the socks of sister’s that’s raising off the blisters.
It’s the last, long mile.”

We were on the last long mile of the great world-wide war. Some of the regiments of the division were engaged in pushing the enemy back across the Meuse, and we who huddled together in the woods that day, waiting for the word to go, trying to keep protected from the falling mist, soaked with mud, our feet wet, our clothes to the waist covered with the slop of the road, shivering with chill, with no chow after our long night march, and with our hard drawn war faces looked less like human beings than savages. The last long miles were telling their stories, setting our jaws and working us to a state of mind where we cared little whether we lived, died, or what became of us, the prevailing desire was to push on and on, or else get relieved where we could again sink down in repose.

Night crept on and as dusk came a couple of machine gun carts came up with chow for the regimental machine gun company, and news that our chow for the regiment would be up in a half hour. Just then the major came back from the regimental P.C. wearing a long, hard expression. He need not have spoken for we knew it.

“Fall the battalion in and pass the word around for everyone to prepare for a long, hard march. That’s all the information I have at present.”

What was it this time? Was the division going to be relieved? We have been in only eight days. Was the general out of the kindness of his heart going to spare us from action this time because of our heavy casualties in the last drive? These and many similar questions were in the minds of the men as we crept over the top of a thick, wooded hill, and down a muddy trail, with here and there signs of fighting and occasionally a doughboy who had fallen in the 26th Infantry assault that morning. It seemed the irony of fate that we should march over the opposite hill just as our chow wagons struggled up to that spot where we left. The fact that chow had not reached us for twenty-four hours was aggravated by a damp, chilly fog that seemed to penetrate and stick, that chow had not reached us for twenty-four hours was aggravated by a damp, chilly fog that seemed to penetrate and stick, but on the whole the men’s hearts were steeled for any fate, and it was good that they were. They would not have been soldiers if they had not.

The battalion had moved only a few hundred yards before the old familiar cry came up from the rear.

“Pass the word up the line’s broke.”

And time and time again some mounted officer or orderly would ride back to connect up the line, and keep someone from being cut off and lost. The men were tired and most anything seemed to break the line.

The major disappeared to go to brigade headquarters, and the adjutant took the battalion on, trusting to luck and scouts out that he could keep liaison with the units ahead and not get utterly lost from the units moving in some direction no one knew what. Across another shelled area where some isolated Boche battery
was pounding a road crossing, on and on that battalion moved until it closed up on the other units and fell out for a rest.

All officers were assembled for the colonel to give instructions on the situation and give orders, orders no one who was present will ever forget.

"We have broken through," he began, "and we aim to make a forty kilometer hike towards Sedan, take position on the heights east of that place, and grab it from the Boche at daylight and thus end the war. This mission is of double significance because it will end the war victoriously for the Allies in the same city where France was finally defeated in 1870, and cash up for France the old grudge she holds against Germany for her defeat.

"Resistance will possibly be met out in front somewhere, but it will be our mission to burst their thin line of defense and push on. The third battalion will constitute the advance guard."

The major turned to his group of officers. "Co. K, the first unit to land on French soil, will send out the advance elements, the other companies will be the support. I will be at the head of the support. March Co. K. one kilometer down the road, take position and send word back. The pace will be governed according to the progress of the leading elements." was his short order.

The adjutant rode back to connect up with the machine gun carts at a road fork. Back he went through a multitude of jams the artillery had made in the road behind us, and had he been able to find the carts, he could not have gotten them through the traffic. As they were not found, the machine gunners continued the long march with their guns and a limited amount of ammunition strapped to their backs.

There was a hold up in the road north of Stone, for there the enemy in evacuating had blown out a bridge, and while the engineers of the division in front were rebuilding the bridge, the column had to cross in single file through another jam of vehicles and get through a little mud caked stream and back on the road again. In a couple of hours from the starting time the column had cleared the blow out and again was in full swing down the hard turnpike.

Doubts and fears were intermingled as it swung through several little towns, for no one knew when we would meet resistance or where the enemy was, until later in the night and near daylight we passed through the little town where the 42nd Division headquarters was located. It was one of the longest night and days of the war. The time dragged heavy as the men dragged their weary and sore feet down the road towards Sedan. It seemed that morning would never come, and that the halts for rest were too long apart. Men went to sleep on their saddles, and there were occasionally a clash of arms and a dull heavy thud as some men would fall unconscious and drop from the ranks. God! Were ever such men made! If they could hold up this well in carrying arms against the foe, what could they do in the reconstruction of America and the world commerce and ideals once the fight is over?

Day broke, and the outfit was still moving towards the heights of Sedan, the sun rose concealed by a mist of clouds and a heavy fog, still moving, but coming into sight of where the division ahead was at work outflanking a few scattered machine guns that had been left behind by the enemy. We were almost to our objective, only a few more kilometers and the big hill in front which circled around the road like an immense horseshoe, we were entering it from the open points, was the heights that commanded our objective.

Was it going to be a triumphal entry with little or no fighting? It seemed so, for we had come this far without meeting the Boche. The high command thought so for they had left the rear of the column, the general and the colonel and their staff, and were at the head of the support with the major and his staff. It seemed as if we were going to walk right in and declare ourselves in possession of the city. It was here that we came in sight of the 42nd Division’s men flanking a machine gun, and we were given orders to take attack formation.

Some of the company commanders complained that it seemed hard to make the men march into the city through the fields in deployed formations, for they were tired, when the road was better walking. The adjutant went forward and reconnoitered for a kilometer in advance and deployed the leading companies as far ahead as possible to save the men. When in attack formation, we lay down on the ground for a ten minute rest and again went forward.

The battalion was scarcely on its feet when the crack-crack-crack of Boche machine guns rang in its ears. When a machine gun is shooting off to one’s side, it gives off a mechanical sound, but when close to the trajectory, it is a loud continuous cracking. Suddenly, for no cause and without command, the battalion automatically dropped like men do when held up by fire. Patrols were pushed out to the side. The fog was lifting. It was about ten A.M. and the enemy could observe us coming when he began to put in his dirty work. All his machine guns and artillery consisting of a few light pieces opened up with direct and flanking fire. Something had to be done, and the safest plan when in doubt is to push forward; besides, our orders were to break through the enemy’s thin line of resistance.

The little village of Chevaugne was five hundred yards in front of us. On we pushed through and beyond it, with here and there a man falling as shells took away several at a time. Some of the men who recently had come from the States and were not trained in the use of their files pushed on with their rifle slung over their shoulders. The major and the adjutant pushed forward to the front line and made the men use their rifles.

We were advancing well up towards the top of the hill when a liaison officer from the 42nd Division informed us that they were going to put down a barrage on the top of the hill in a few minutes. The advance was immediately halted and the men dug in, but the barrage never came. One or two registering shots and then the telephone line went out. No barrage. We were suffering fearful losses; to hold where we were would cost more than to advance, yet the thought of getting caught in an American barrage was worse than the losses in holding. We held as minutes merged into hours, and occasionally a plea came from a company commander for more ammunition for his automatics, or another would have to move a few yards to the right or left to get out of a shelled area or the path of a machine gun.

The rear echelon of the battalion was in the little liberated village where the old women fearless of the shelling and the sniping down the streets were giving the men hot coffee and sometimes hot cakes, the tears of joy streaming down their cheeks. Those were a few moments of rare inspiration to a fighting man. They were so glad to be delivered from three years of enemy domination and towards dusk when the French soldiers began to come in to relieve us, there were shouts of joy. They had given us infor-
mation that the enemy was pulling back and would not fight longer than dark, for they were only making this stand to enable them to get their supplies out of Sedan. The information had come from a civilian who had slipped through the lines, for the French went on up the hill in a column of squads as our men quietly went to the rear to assemble and seek the chow wagons.

The companies went out one by one, and each came by the aid station where each squad carried back a wounded man. They could do this by one man taking all the rifles and the others taking the men who could be carried out on stretchers.

"Looks hard to ask men," the battalion surgeon said, "but you would want someone to take you out of here if you were in the same condition."

* * *

The next morning the official communiqués gave us credit for seizing the hill heights east of Sedan. We had gotten four or five kilometers behind where we were relieved, slept in the mud by the roadside and by ten o’clock made a couple more kilometers and were at our kitchen again where the colonel approached the battalion staff.

"How many losses today? That was noble work, couldn’t be better," he said.

Three more kilometers measured our hike for the day, where we fell out for one night’s sleep near Le Besace, where we were held in reserve. Then another night found us on the grounds of the Chateau de Belvil, to wait and see what developed and to spend Saturday and Sunday in policing up. Rumors began to come about the German courier who had left allied headquarters for Spa, and talk that it was about time for his return. As near as we were on the eve of the Armistice, there were few rumors because we had been cut off from the news of the world for nearly a couple of weeks, and what little reached us came more as hearsay from what had come over radio to division or army headquarters. Everyone felt that we were on the edge of something big, we didn’t know what, whether it was peace or whether it was war and more war. We were held in reserve to force our way across the Meuse and follow the fleeing Hun into his own backyard, and there was an uncertainty as to whether or not we were traveling towards another training and rest area. Everyone just lived the hours as they came and thought or cared little of what the future would bring.

Another batch of officers reached us here with stories of how they had trailed after the division for almost endless days and nights, and this two day stop had enabled them to catch up. Some of them were veterans of other fights and were returning from the hospitals; others were from replacement divisions just from the States.

Ten o’clock Monday morning found the middle of the column struggling up a long muddy hill, the “Mule Skinners” urging their teams, and the men giving them a push. The head of the column was resting at a fork in the road waiting for another unit of the division to pass. As the column passed, a lieutenant came down the line shouting frantically to his men that the war was over and the Armistice would go into effect at eleven A.M. The adjutant turned to the colonel.

“It may be all stuff,” the colonel said. “There are so many rumors afloat we had better keep quiet for a while.” It did seem like all stuff, for the column trudges on in the mud, the big guns kept booming and booming.

Thirty minutes later the colonel came back to the head of the leading battalion. “That was the right dope. Look here,” and he produced a small slip as evidence. It read:

“Effective Nov. 11 at 11 A.M. hostilities on all fronts will cease. After this time the Allied line will hold fast and not make advances.” [signed] Foch.

The adjutant went back through the battalion and announced it to each platoon as it passed and passed the message back to the next in line. There was not a movement in the hard poker faces of the men as the announcement was made. There were no shouts of joy, no outbursts of enthusiasm, but occasionally someone would say that it was the same old stuff, and then there would be an argument as to whether or not they were being kidded. When the message reached the battalion in the rear, they were halted, which gave time for a confidence winning word before the announcement was read, and it was followed by an outburst of joy.

As the adjutant rode back up the column, of those weary, muddy, war worn veterans, a miracle seemed to have wrought itself on the faces of the command. The old hard war face was gone, and in its place some of the men smiled in spite of the hardships of the march, others seemed to move with light step, and all seemed to realize again that they were real human beings, and all they had to do to get out of the war was to live and keep on hiking and hiking.

Eleven o’clock came, and just as the big guns stopped, the horse the colonel was riding and had been a regimental pet for some time suddenly dropped dead. Then even the doubting Thomases believed something was happening out of the usual.

Night found us on the big hill opposite Bantheville, a little village that had been reduced to where nothing but the road crossing and a few piles of stones were left. The men had had a few hours rest as the hike that day had been short. Chow was up too, and everyone had a couple of good meals. Someone lit a fire, another and another fire was kindled. Then someone in a jesting manner in a deep heavy voice would command:

“Put that light out, before I shoot it out,” and someone would reply, “Don’t let it worry you. There ain’t no more Boche planes overhead to rain down on us.” The dirty rascals, and some more talk about them.

Things were all changed. How strange it seemed to see a thousand fires on the hills without the feeling that hell was going to break loose any minute. Some man in one of the companies had camouflaged a grenade in his pocket, struck it while cutting wood, and was laid to rest. There was a great wave of sympathy for the poor fellow who had endured the hardships and been killed on the day it was beginning to be over.

Another short day’s hike on the other side of Bantheville, and the men began to feel like celebrating. Camp fires were lit at dark, and some men had found a Boche ammunition dump in which there were boeuf flares. The horizon was lit up with them for hours with all the varieties and colors of the rainbow in the sky at once. Then news came that we were to prepare to march on the Coblenz Bridgehead in a couple of days. The details getting ready to police up some battlefield areas were called in, and things set on foot for the next big move. Soon the outfit was on its way swinging down the road with a steady step and a long smile, ready and willing to be part of the Army of Occupation, and curious to see the land of “squareheadism” of which every doughboy had heard so much.
A Tarheel’s Thoughts on Gettysburg

By William Northrop

“If I should die, think only this of me; that there’s some corner of a foreign field that is forever England.”

RUPERT BROOKE

The Soldier

This year marks the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg and the National Park Service is expecting literally thousands of tourists. The Gettysburg National Military Park consists of almost 6,000 acres in the piedmont of southern Pennsylvania, within some ten miles of the Maryland line. The park belongs to the American people, but some 900 acres within its boundaries are vested in private or at least non-Federal Government hands. These parcels are known as “inholdings” and are constantly being sought for inclusion in the park.

Interestingly for us, there was a 120-acre tract that encompassed Herbst Woods on McPherson’s Ridge where the Gettysburg Country Club was located. There on the golf course, Johnston Pettigrew’s Tarheel Brigade attacked the Union Army’s vaunted Iron Brigade and chopped them to pieces on 1 July 1863. It was here that the 26th North Carolina made a long division problem out of the 24th Michigan and part of the 19th Indiana and drove off the survivors. (The regiments on both sides suffered over 70% casualties in that fight.)

In the year 2010, the Susquehanna Bank foreclosed on the Country Club and ownership of that sacred ground went up for grabs. Somehow, the Civil War Trust managed to acquire the land, or at least 95 acres of it, and in March 2011, the National Park Service announced its acquisition and inclusion in the National Military Park. The land will be cleared and returned to its appearance in 1863.

Slowly, “inholdings” of single unit family dwellings built post-battle are being acquired and the land cleared. Generally, such organizations as the Civil War Trust and even the State of Pennsylvania acquire the land and deed it over to the Park Service.

There is, however, one choice acre within the park that will never be given up, despite the strong efforts that have continued since the 1920s. That is located down on Seminary Ridge (now West Confederate Avenue) where the topographical maps indicate the area rises some forty feet above the surrounding terrain. It was on that ridge, at that approximate location, that Pettigrew’s boys staged for the Pickett-Pettigrew charge on 3 July 1863.

That particular piece of sacred ground belongs to the State of North Carolina. Park Rangers like to remark that one can actually straddle the property line and stand simultaneously in the Keystone and Tarheel states.

There on that historic site North Carolina erected arguably the most beautiful and poignant monument on the battlefield. Designed by Gutzon Borglum of Mount Rushmore fame, the statue was dedicated on 3 July 1929, the 66th anniversary of the famous charge against the Union center.

West of the statue stands a granite tablet memorializing the contribution made by North Carolina … 32 regiments, some 14,147 men … to the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia for the three-day battle. North Carolina committed more troops than any other Southern state, save Virginia. The Tarheel contingent suffered some 6,000 casualties or about 40%. As the stone tablet notes, one in four Confederate soldiers who fell at Gettysburg was a Tarheel.

The grass and the trees on that acre are maintained privately as is the snow in winter. The National Park Service is not respon-
sible and the Old North State pays the tab for the upkeep. It is a strange arrangement and the only one of its kind on the entire battlefield.

* * * *

Iverson’s Pits

“…unwarned, unled as a brigade, went forward Iverson’s deserted band to its doom. Deep and long must the desolate homes and orphan children of North Carolina rue the rashness of that hour.”

VINES E. TURNER
Captain, 23rd North Carolina, CSA

HISTORY OF THE 23RD NORTH CAROLINA REGIMENT

Alfred Iverson, Jr., was a Georgian who ended up commanding a North Carolina brigade at Gettysburg by attrition. He came into the Confederate Army with military experience in the Mexican War where his father, a United States Senator, managed to wangle him a commission. When The Struggle broke out, his father intervened once more and Jr. was commissioned as the colonel of the 20th North Carolina. He had a decent war record up until Gettysburg in July 1863. The brigade he inherited upon the death of Samuel Garland consisted of four regiments, the 5th, 12th, 20th, and 23rd North Carolina State Troops in Robert Rodes’ division of Ewell’s II Corps.

On 1 July, Ewell, who was north of Gettysburg, was ordered back to rejoin the main army. Rodes’ division moved down the Heidlersburg Road with Iverson’s brigade in the vanguard. Arriving on the field at Oak Ridge, Iverson deployed his brigade in line of battle and advanced. The Yankees, for their part, set a perfect ambush for the Tarheels. Yet it took Confederate incompetence to make it work.

Iverson hastily and foolishly moved out across John Forney’s farm to the sound of the guns with no reconnaissance and fronted by no skirmish line. Unknown to Iverson, who by all reports was not even on the field, five Yankee regiments lay in ambush out of sight behind a low stone wall angled on their flank and front. On command, the Federals rose and delivered a massive, short-range volley into the ranks of the surprised Tarheels, practically annihilating Iverson’s brigade.

The Yankees then policed up hundreds of prisoners. The 12th North Carolina, which was on the far Confederate flank sustained the least of it and began fighting back. This attracted Dobson Ramseur’s and elements of Junius Daniel’s Tarheel brigades who made short work of the Yankees, sending them fleeing the field and back through Gettysburg.

Alfred Iverson, Jr. and the Battlefield Monument

The numbers are unfocused, but it is thought that perhaps as many as two hundred Tarheels lay dead on the field, still lined up in formation. The Confederates who controlled the site dug trenches behind the lines of dead bodies and buried their comrades. These burial trenches came to be called “Iverson’s pits.”

Within days of the conclusion of this great battle, local contractors buried the dead … men and horses … usually where or close to where they fell. A little later, some 3,512 Union dead were disinterred and reburied in the new cemetery, fittingly atop Cemetery Ridge. And it was here that President Lincoln delivered his Gettysburg Address on 19 November 1863.

On the battlefield of Shiloh in Tennessee, the Confederate dead were left in mass graves when the Union bodies were moved to a neat, official cemetery. This also happened at Gettysburg. But unlike Shiloh, Southerners amassed enough money to have their boys sent home. So, several years later, some 3,320 bodies were disinterred and sent south to Richmond, Raleigh, Charleston, and Savannah.

It was then that the problem of “Iverson’s pits” arose. Since the Confederates dug the burial trenches, their exact location could not be determined. In the end, Iverson’s boys were left where they were buried and were never returned home. Local Gettysburg lore holds that Forney’s field is the most haunted site in the park. Be that as it may, it is indeed a corner of some foreign field that will be forever North Carolina.

JUST A COMMON SOLDIER
(A Soldier Died Today)
by A. Lawrence Vaincourt

He was getting old and paunchy and his hair was falling fast, And he sat around the Legion, telling stories of the past. Of a war that he had fought in and the deeds that he had done, In his exploits with his buddies; they were heroes, every one. And tho’ sometimes, to his neighbors, his tales became a joke, All his Legion buddies listened, for they knew whereof he spoke. But we’ll hear his tales no longer for old Bill has passed away, And the world’s a little poorer, for a soldier died today.

He will not be mourned by many, just his children and his wife, For he lived an ordinary and quite uneventful life. He was just a common soldier and his ranks are growing thin, Or would you prefer a soldier, who has sworn to defend His home, his kin and Country and would fight until the end? Should you find yourself in danger, with your enemies at hand, Would you want a politician with his ever-shifting stand? Or would you prefer a soldier, who has sworn to defend His home, his kin and Country and would fight until the end? He was just a common soldier and his ranks are growing thin, But his presence should remind us we may need his like again. For when countries are in conflict, then we find the soldier’s part Is to clean up all the troubles that the politicians start.

If we cannot do him honor while he’s here to hear the praise, Then at least let’s give him homage at the ending of his days. If we cannot do him honor while he’s here to hear the praise, Then at least let’s give him homage at the ending of his days. Perhaps just a simple headline in a paper that would say, Our Country is in mourning, for a soldier died today.

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NOTE: This poem is printed courtesy of Randy Vaincourt, the son of A. Lawrence Vaincourt, a veteran of World War II, who passed away in 2009.
The Story Behind the Stone

By Paul Peeples
USMC (Retired)

The Airborne and Special Operations Museum in Fayetteville, North Carolina, has many monuments and memorial paver stones on its grounds. They each have a story behind them, here is one of them. It is of a hometown hero named Alexander MacRae.

He was born in Fayetteville on September 4, 1829, to John and Mary Ann MacRae. His father was the Postmaster of the town, who had succeeded his father, Duncan, in that position. The MacRae family had emigrated to the Cumberland County area of North Carolina in the 1770s from Scotland.

Alexander, known as Alec, to his friends and family, attended the Donaldson Academy and St. John’s Episcopal Church during his formative years in Fayetteville. At the age of fourteen he enrolled in the Classical Course of Studies at Newark Collage in Newark, Delaware. In 1847 he accepted an appointment to the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York. It was during this time that he would abbreviate his surname to “McRae”. He graduated twenty-third out of a class of forty-two in 1851 and was assigned to the Regiment of Mounted Rifleman (RMR).

The RMR had been formed for the mission of providing security for emigrants traveling along the Oregon Trail, with most of its officers being appointed from outside the Regular Army line. Captain Samuel Walker of the Texas Rangers, for whom the Walker Colt Pistol was named, was one of them. The RMR would join Scott’s Army in its expedition into Mexico and serve with distinction, earning the title “Brave Rifles” from its commander. After the end of the Mexican War, it would be assigned to duties in Texas and the newly acquired territories in the South West.

Alexander would serve first at Ft. Merill and Ft. Ewell along the Neuces River, then in the Trans-Pecos area in West Texas, filling billets as assistant Quartermaster and Adjutant at the company levels for the next four years. He would take an extended period of leave in 1856, returning to North Carolina and also traveling to France to visit his older brother, Duncan K. MacRae, who was Consul General to Paris. The year 1857 would see Alexander promoted to First Lieutenant and given command of Company E of the RMR in the New Mexico Territory. In the spring of 1858 his company and other elements of the RMR would venture from Fort Union, New Mexico, into Utah to support Colonel Albert Sidney Johnston’s punitive expedition against the Mormons. Returning to Fort Union in September, he would be assigned to Recruiting Duty based out of Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania. He would go on leave to Fayetteville in the summer of 1859. During February and March of 1860 he would go to the Blue Grass State of Kentucky to obtain horses for the Army. In August of 1860 he would head back west with a detachment of Recruits, Remount Horses, and recent West Point graduate Second Lieutenant Joseph Wheeler. Upon his return to the RMR he was given command of Company K, which he would lead on a successful raid against a Kiowa Tribe camp located in the Indian Territory (near current Cold Spring, Oklahoma) in January of 1861. The new year would be one of tragedy and challenge for this Tarheel native son.

The opening months of 1861 would see seven southern states, including Texas, secede from the Union. Thirteen of Alexander’s brother officers of the RMR, Second Lieutenant Joseph Wheeler and Captain Richard S. Ewell among them, would resign their commissions and join the armed forces of the Confederate States of America. Alexander would be leading a detachment of the RMR, ironically, keeping the peace between ranchers and the Comanche along the Gallinas River region of New Mexico, when Fort Sumter would be fired upon by Confederate forces. On 2 May, Alexander’s mother would pass away, and on the 20th, North Carolina would secede from the Union.

Four of Alexander’s brothers; Duncan Kirkland, James Cameron, Thomas Ruffin, and John would serve actively in the Confederate Army. Duncan Kirkland would rise to command the 5th North Carolina Regiment and lead it in the Battle of Williamsburg in May of 1862, the Seven Day’s Battles around Richmond, South Mountain, and Sharpsburg (a.k.a. Antietam) in Maryland. James Cameron was already a member of the Fayetteville Independent Light Infantry when the war started. He would participate in the Battles of Big Bethel and Williamsburg and eventually serve in the rank of Major on General Lawrence Simmons Baker’s staff. His daughter, Mary Shakleford, would become the first woman to graduate from the University of North Carolina. Alexander’s youngest brother, Robert, would, at the age of fourteen serve on the Confederate blockade runners Owl and Badger. It is not hyperbole that the conflict of 1861-65 did set brother against brother.

There were schisms within the Territory of New Mexico as well. Many American residents of the area south of the Gila River, acquired in the Gadsden Purchase of 1853, had closer social, political, and economic ties with Texas and other southern states than with the territorial capital of Santa Fe. Some had even petitioned for this area to be a separate territory. Thus, it should be no surprise that the towns of Mesilla and Tucson in the south would pass ordinances of succession in 1861. Confederate volunteers, led by a Colonel Baylor, would sortie from Ft. Bliss, Texas, occupy Mesilla, drive out and then capture the Union garrison of nearby Ft. Fillmore in July of 1861. Confederate sympathizers would form the para-military “Arizona Rangers” to fight Unionists and Indians. The lands south of the 34th parallel would come to be called the Confederate Territory of Arizona. The battle lines were now drawn in the Southwest.

The scattered Regular United States Army garrisons in the New Mexico Territory would consolidate at Fort Craig, by the Rio Grande in the center, and Fort Union, northeast of Santa Fe. Volunteer units, one under the command of the famous Christopher “Kit” Carson, and local militias were also mobilized. Union volunteer units were also raised in California and the Colorado Territory to provide reinforcements. The United States Army also reorganized its mounted units. The RMR was re-designated the Third U.S. Cavalry in August of 1861.
Alexander, promoted to Captain in June of 1861, was sent to Fort Craig and served as Post Adjutant until November of that year. He was then given the task of forming a provisional artillery battery. This unit was composed of eighty-five Regular U.S. Army cavalrymen and six various field pieces. McRae’s Battery, as it came to be known, would soon be called to action.

The New Mexico Campaign of 1862, other than serving as a backdrop to the 1966 Sergio Leone movie; “The Good, The Bad and The Ugly”, has been obscured by events that took place east of the Mississippi that year. The Battle of Valverde, where Alexander met his fate, is even more obscure. That being said, I will give a brief account of the Campaign, the part Alexander played in it, and its aftermath.

Among the exodus of former U.S. Army officers flocking to the Southern cause in 1861 was one Henry H. Sibley of Louisiana. He had been serving in the New Mexico Territory as Brevet Major of Dragoons. He was able to persuade his fellow West Point graduate Jefferson Davis on the feasibility of raising a force in Texas for a campaign of conquest in the Southwest. After all, had not Steven Watts Kearney done the same with a relatively small force just a decade and half before? As a Confederate Brigadier General, he would oversee the formation of an approximately 3,500 man unit in the San Antonio, Texas, area that summer. They would start moving west, in stages, across the 750 miles between San Antonio and Ft Bliss in October of 1861. By the end of 1861 they were camped along the banks of the Rio Grande in the Fort Thorn and Dona Ana area north of Mesilla, New Mexico. The new year of 1862 would see them move north to carve out a new empire for the Confederacy.

Opposing this invasion was a force of approximately 1,200 U.S. Army Regulars, approximately 2,600 New Mexican Volunteer/Militia, and about 80 Colorado Volunteers at Fort Craig under the command of Colonel Edward R.S. Canby. Like his opponent, he was a veteran of antebellum service in the Southwest. Between 12 and 20 February, Sibley’s force would maneuver around Ft. Craig, having determined that it was too strong a position for them to assault without heavy artillery. They would move northeast around a large, dark, volcanic rock mesa to a ford of the Rio Grande at a place called Valverde, an oasis of grass and cottonwood trees in the rocky desert. Canby had already sent a part of his garrison out to secure the ford. They send word to him early on the 20th, that the Confederates had arrived. He then begins dispatching the bulk of his forces, including McRae’s Battery, to engage them.

Dawn breaks on the cold morning of 21 February as Sibley’s Confederates engage their opponents holding the east bank of the ford. Union artillery and rifle fire dominates the field in the morning. Alexander’s six field pieces are backed up by a two gun battery of 24 pound howitzers. There is a dramatic moment, reminiscent of Waterloo, when a company of mounted Texans, armed with lances, charge the Colorado Volunteer Infantry. The Coloradans form a square and repulse them with a close range volley of small arms fire. The bulk of Sibley’s men dismount and take cover behind a low ridge overlooking the ford. Many Confederate horses are killed by indirect artillery fire, adding to the loss of 200 thirsty mules that had broken lose the night before and “defected” to the Union position on the riverbank. There is a lull amid the midday snow flurries as both sides replenish ammunition, eat, and gather reinforcements.

Sibley, ill and/or drunk, relinquishes tactical command to Colonel Tom Green, an experienced veteran of the Texas War for Independence and the subsequent conflicts with Mexico. He concentrates about 1,000 men behind the center of the ridge. Colonel Canby arrives and takes direct control of his forces. He redeploys Alexander’s Battery, with some infantry support, to the center of his line, near a grove of cottonwood trees and shifts other units right in preparation to make an assault to sweep the Confederates from the ridge. Green now sees that an 800 yard wide gap has opened up in the Union line and orders an immediate attack on the now exposed center. The assaulting Confederates come over the ridge in three waves and drop to the ground when they see the guns fire at them, then stand up and deliver a volley of small arms fire and press on the attack. Alexander is wounded but still tries to rally support, but some of the infantry break and run. He returns to his guns and stands with his men. About 750 Confederates, some now coming thorough the cover of the cottonwood trees, engage the 250 remaining Union Infantry and the 80 wounded in action, 92 captured. About 100 Confederates guarding the supply train unguarded and destroyed its wagons. The Confederate victory will prove to be a Pyrrhic one.

Confederate losses will be 72 men killed in action, 157 men wounded in action, and about 1,000 horses and mules killed. Union losses are 111 killed in action, 160 wounded in action, and 204 missing in action. Most of the missing are local militia who will straggle back into Fort Craig over the next few days. Sibley’s forces still cannot take Fort Craig. Many of his previously mounted troops are now afoot, and he has lost wagons and mules. He is forced to leave his sick and wounded behind in the nearby village of Soccorro. Canby has issued orders to his troops to: “follow the enemy closely in his march up the valley, harass him in front, flank and rear with irregular troops and cavalry, burn or remove all supplies in his front, but avoid a general engagement, except where the position is strongly in our favor”. They will have success in denying Sibley’s men the supplies and animals they need.

The Confederates will press on regardless and capture the territorial capital of Santa Fe on 10 March. Sibley will send about 1,100 of his men north and they will be engaged by Union forces in the Apache Canyon and Glorieta Pass area between 26 and 28 March. Confederate losses in these engagements will be 50 killed in action, 80 wounded in action, and 92 captured. About 100 Confederates guarding the supply train will be overwhelmed by surprise attack of 400 Colorado Volunteers under the command of a Major Chivington. Sibley’s army is now forced to make a painful retreat back to Fort Bliss. About 1,200 will complete this journey in late April, retaining the artillery pieces captured from McRae’s Battery, now known as “The Guns of Valverde”. Union reinforcements from California will help drive the Confederates from New Mexico and re-occupy Fort Bliss by August of 1862.

The 3rd U.S. Cavalry will move east later in 1862 and will see service in North Carolina before the war’s end. It will be among
the units to assault Kettle Hill in Cuba in 1898. The Regiment became Armored Cavalry (3rd ACR) during World War II. The tradition of service in the west has continued, being based at Fort Bliss, TX, Fort Carson, CO, and currently at Fort Hood, TX, over the past thirty years. It has participated in Operation Desert Storm in 1991 and peacekeeping operations in Bosnia in the 1990s. During its four tours of duty in Iraq between 2003 and 2011, it earned 5 Valorous Unit Commendations. The ethos of service, sacrifice, and devotion to duty exemplified by Captain Alexander McRae still lives on with his regiment. In 2011, it was redesignated a Stryker Unit, so essentially it is again a Regiment of Mounted Riflemen.

In 1863, the U.S. Army named a post in New Mexico Fort McRae. It remained active until 1876. The site is now under the waters of Elephant Butte Reservoir, near the current town of Truth or Consequences. McRae’s remains were respectfully moved from New Mexico to the cemetery at West Point in 1867. McRae Boulevard was dedicated in El Paso in 1958. Located along that street is Eastwood High School where a cannon is on display that is supposed to be one of the surviving guns of Valverde. In May of 2013 a stone from Valverde was brought to Fayetteville and a plaque commemorating Alexander’s life and service placed on it. This stone now sits at 130 Gillespie Street in Fayetteville, site of the MacRae Family Residence in the early 19th century. Many proud MacRae family descendants attended its dedication.

Alexander was praised by friend and foe alike for his conduct at the Battle of Valverde. One of the Texans who made the assault on the Union center at Valverde was Private William L. Davidson, A Co, 5th Texas Mounted Volunteers. He had this to say about his opponent: “... he died by his guns and no braver man lived or died on that field. He was a Southern Man, a North Carolinian, but he died fighting the South, but he died where he thought his duty led him.”

Davidson, though born in Mississippi, had North Carolina roots through his Tarheel Father. He also graduated from Davidson College that had been named for his Great Uncle, General William Lee Davidson, a Patriot killed in the Battle of Cowan’s Ford in 1781. William L. Davidson would survive further battles and attain the rank of Lieutenant Colonel by 1865.

Lastly, Alexander’s Commanding Officer, Col. Edward R.S. Canby, had this to say about him in the official report he wrote to Washington on 1 March 1862:

“Among these (casualties), however, is one isolated by peculiar circumstances, whose memory deserves notice from a higher authority than mine. Pure in character, upright in conduct, devoted to his profession, and of a loyalty that was deaf to the seductions of family and friends. Captain McRae died, as he had lived, an example of the best and highest qualities that man can possess.”

Women Workers at the Fayetteville Arsenal

By Megan Maxwell
1897 Poe House Education Coordinator
Museum of the Cape Fear Historical Complex
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“When the history of the Revolution is written, the patriotism of women, modest as well at true, no less heroic than gentle, will grade the brightest page.”

CHARLESTON MERCURY via FAYETTEVILLE OBSERVER, 7 Nov 1861

The contribution of ladies on the home front during the Civil War was widely documented by historians, newspapers accounts, letters, and diaries. As men joined the ranks of the Confederate forces, the women left behind immersed themselves in volunteerism by nursing the sick and wounded at newly established hospitals and providing clothing, blankets, and other homemade goods as fast as their fingers could work. They started Ladies Aid Societies, raised funds, and gathered together for sewing and quilting sessions, all in an effort to show their patriotism and support for the Southern cause. These were all proper activities in which the educated, wealthy, and respectable ladies of society could be engaged.

Seldom documented are the stories of laboring class women. These women were left alone to tend small farms and businesses and provide for their families and themselves without the benefit of an education or large bank account. Employment at the Fayetteville Arsenal as cartridge makers provided steady and reasonable income for young women and girls forced to find work to survive the war years. In the Governors Papers of Henry T. Clark at the N.C. State Archives, a payroll list for August 1861 shows 87 employees working at the Arsenal, including men, women, and slaves. The document indicates the length of time each employee had been working, their pay rate, and job description. Based on this information, there were 29 women and girls making cartridges at the Arsenal in August 1861 for forty to fifty cents per day. In mid July 1861, the Fayetteville Observer reported, “The Richmond Whig said that from 100 to 250 white women and girls are employed in one building in that city, making cartridges. We believe that 50 or 60 are similarly employed at the Arsenal here.” This number is
Ellis signed over the Arsenal to the Confederacy in June 1861. for a mere two weeks by the end of August 1861, and Governor longer than 14 days, and Davis is also listed as employed for only slightly inflated based on the August 1861 payroll, but as the war dragged on, it is possible that the number of women and girls working at the Arsenal increased significantly to keep up production.

All of the workers listed as cartridge makers on the payroll are female, with the exception of James Davis and Henderson Lockaman. Davis is listed as the “Pyrotechnist Supervising Cartridge makers” with a pay of $2.00 a day. Lockaman is listed as a laborer, “making and packing cartridges” for $1.25 per day. Curiously, none of the female workers have been employed for longer than 14 days, and Davis is also listed as employed for only 14 days. This would suggest that the use of women workers for cartridge making had been established at the Fayetteville Arsenal for a mere two weeks by the end of August 1861, and Governor Ellis signed over the Arsenal to the Confederacy in June 1861.

What is known about the women on the August 1861 roster has been gleaned from the 1860, 1870, and 1880 U.S. Federal Censuses, as well as N.C. Marriage and Death Records. Records were found for 21 of the 29 names on the roster, providing a general profile of these Arsenal workers. The average age of the female workers in August 1861 is 20 years old, and the youngest worker is Dicy Burkett, age 11. Dicy was only paid forty cents per day, while the majority of the other workers received fifty cents per day. Only four other girls were paid the forty cents wage, but it is unclear if the lower pay was entirely based on age because records were not found for all of these girls. The oldest female worker listed is Catherine Armstrong, age 36, who married Private George R. Hornrine of the N.C. 2nd Arsenal Guard Infantry in March 1867. A few of the other girls also married soldiers in the Arsenal Guard or had fathers who served in the Guard. Since all but one of the women were single at this time, finding a husband may have been another motivation for employment at the Arsenal. One of three sets of sisters confirmed to be working as cartridge makers, Charity Ann Wright and Sarah Wright married soldiers on opposite sides of the conflict, Charity married Private Edward R. Newell, “C” Company, 3rd Infantry, on December 1863, and Sarah married Private David Fields, PA 13th Cavalry, in July 1865.

According to the 1860 Census, five of the girls employed at the Arsenal were already listed as factory hands or factory operatives, and one woman was listed as a seamstress. This suggests that the pay at the Arsenal was possibly higher than what they had been earning at their previous jobs. The others list no occupation in 1860, although only four show that they attended school in the previous year. Three of the women over the age of 20 were illiterate, and five listed one or both parents or guardians as illiterate. All of the information along with the occupations of their fathers or guardians (carpenters, cooper, farmers, farm hands) placed these women and girls firmly in the lower class of society. Only two of the girls’ families owned land.

Working in a cartridge factory was extremely dangerous and potentially deadly. On 17 September 1861, an explosion rocked the Allegheny Arsenal near Pittsburg, PA, and 78 people were killed, mostly women and girls. In March 1863, the Confederate Laboratory on Brown’s Island, Richmond, VA, exploded, killing 40-50 women and girls. Twenty-one women and girls, mostly Irish immigrants, were killed by an explosion at the Washington Arsenal in June 1864. An article in the Fayetteville Observer from 15 December 1862, acknowledged that assistance of “the Fire Company at the Arsenal” in putting out a fire that broke out in the downtown area about one mile away from the Arsenal site. The existence of this fire company further emphasizes the dangers of working in the cartridge factories. Additional research may be done to discover when the Arsenal fire company was organized and if this was a common practice at other arsenals.

The stigma that factory work was beneath their social status and the dangers of the occupation were the major reasons that upper class women did not participate in cartridge manufacturing. However, there are references to ladies working as clerks at the Fayetteville Arsenal. From the Richmond Whig, 16 October 1864: “The Commandant of the S.C. Arsenal at Fayetteville, N.C., has inaugurated the system for employing female clerks to do the work of men detailed for the purpose. Two of the young ladies of Fayetteville are now engaged as clerks at the arsenal.” It is possible that as many as four young women were employed in this manner in early 1864. According to a local historian, Mrs. John H. Anderson, they included “Misses Campbell Stedman, Taylor, and Ellison.” Anderson declared that “the pay given these young ladies was black alpaca cloth, which was used in the arsenal for making cartridges. The alpaca combined with scraps of colored silk, make the most beautiful dresses for the girls who, at the close of the war, could not procure new clothes.” (John Oates, The Story of Fayetteville, pg. 283.) Alpaca cloth was not used in making cartridges, but was used to make gunpowder bags, which would have been readily on hand at the Arsenal. Payment in the form of fabric made working outside the home more palpable for these young women.

The Fayetteville Arsenal did produce weapons and accoutrements during the war; however, its greatest contribution was in the form of small arms ammunition. Records show that from January to August 1864, the arsenal produced 900,000 rounds of ammunition. This rate of production would not have been possible without the assistance of women and girls manufacturing cartridges. The value of their labor and sacrifice is immeasurable and deserves recognition. Through additional research their part in the story of the Fayetteville Arsenal can be told.
 Harmon Chadbourn Rorison  
_A Tar Heel who made a name for himself in three wars_  
By Robert J. Cooke

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**FOREWORD:** Well, I finally got around to reading a book (War Birds: The Diary of an Unknown Aviator) I had won in the raffle at the NCMHS Symposium last May! To my surprise, I came across the following paragraph: “We have another of the Oxford cadets with us, Rorison, who is assigned to B flight. He’s from Wilmington, N.C. He’s a serious youth and can figure out anything on paper with a slide rule.” This was John Lee Chadbourn Rorison, and, investigating further, I uncovered information about John’s brother, Harmon. Both brothers, Harmon and John Rorison, served as aviators in the Great War; this, however, is Harmon’s story.

In November 1918, along with five other pilots, Lieutenant Rorison was on a bombing mission over the front lines in France. Suddenly attacked by 18 German fighters (type Fokker), he saw three of his comrades go down in flames almost immediately. Maneuvering his Spad so as to get behind the Germans firing on the other two members of his patrol, he sighted on one of the attackers and opened fire. The Fokker went down. Not hesitating, Harmon quickly went after another German and successfully flamed it as well. He then flew wildly through the sky, shaking off other Fokkers trying to shoot him down. Several of them fired at him, and, although wounded, he was still in the game. He sighted a Fokker and opened up on the German. It was his third kill in 30 minutes! Unfortunately, at this point his gun jammed, so he realized it was time to get out of the fight. Later decorated for his bravery, his citation read in part: “By skillful maneuvering, he shook off the rest of the Fokkers and reached his lines, 15 miles away, in safety.” Later recounting his experience, he said a bullet had pierced his gas tank and sprayed fuel in his face. At least one round had struck a bomb he had brought it back to Bakersville. On one such trip, Harmon brought them back to Bakersville. In December 1897, Lizzie died. In January 1905, at the age of twelve, Harmon penned a note to his Aunt: “Dear Darling, I have made up my mind to be good. I can and I will. If you will wipe out all the past I will turn over a New Year’s New Leaf. Please watch me and wipe out all the past.” The boys’ father, Richard, came to visit from time to time and brought them back to Bakersville. On such a trip, Harmon reported: “We had a very nice time in Bakersville. Grandpa Rorison had a mica office. We used to go over there and get mica, his office was across the creek. When we were in Bakersville, our Papa and ourselves went out fishing ... all of us caught about 5 little fish. When we went home that night we ate them.” Grandpa Rorison (John Lee Rorison) worked for the Spears Company in Philadelphia and had been sent to various parts of the country in

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Harmon Chadbourn Rorison

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Early on, the boys showed initiative: at the age of fourteen, Harmon, together with his brother John and another young lad, began publishing a newspaper entitled *The Wilmington Boy*. Just like an adult paper, many aspects were covered: “The paper has its regular features, editorial, sporting page, local paragraphs and advertisements.” Typewritten and mimeographed, the paper was said to be popular among the town’s younger element.

Schooling was not neglected with Harmon attending local schools, then went to the Jefferson School for Boys (Charlottesville, Va.), and the University of Virginia, which he attended from 1911 to 1915. Following this, he went to the University of North Carolina and graduated with a degree in law. While at college, he was a member of the Alpha Tau Omega fraternity and upon graduation, founded employment with a law firm in Wilmington (Bellamy and Bellamy) and one day, using the office stationary, typed a note (likely to Aunt Serena): “I had to pay Mr. Bellamy’s bills this morning. I wish that I could pay Uncle Charlie’s bills to [sic] and then I would make 10 cents.” Adventurous even as a youngster, at the age of twenty-three, he mounted his Indian motorcycle and set off west. Riding from Asheville to Atlanta, Georgia, he broke the existing speed record for the trip, making it in nine hours and nineteen minutes. Turning around and riding back, he again broke his own record, arriving at the Asheville post office in eight hours and five minutes. At this point in his life, Harmon was employed by James and James, a real estate and insurance business in Wilmington.

When the United States entered the Great War and joined Britain and France in April 1917, there were only 65 fliers in the U.S. service with most of these unfamiliar with foreign aircraft. Schools were established, and aviators turned out and quickly were sent overseas. With the coming of war, Harmon desired to join the Air Corps but couldn’t wait for the government to train him, so he paid for and attended a flying school in Staten Island, New York, and later attended Ground School at Ohio State University (August 1917). One month after graduating he was commissioned a first lieutenant in the U.S. Army Signal Corp’s Air Service (18 November 1917) and received his orders: “The following named [officer] of the Aviation Section, Signal Reserve Corps, is ordered to active duty and will report in person to the Commanding Officer, Aeronautical Concentration Camp, Garden City, Long Island, New York, for assignment to duty with a squadron.” He dutifully reported to Mineola (N.Y.) to the 1st Air Depot. His patriotism showed itself when he sent his army paychecks home to buy building lots and also to fund construction of homes where the shipyard workers would live.

Sent overseas to France, he trained at Issoudin, one of three advanced training schools established in that country. The site, at which construction began in August 1917, was in operation by October of that year. “The situation was, however, very unsatisfactory, as the barracks and accommodations at the school were of the crudest kind, and it had been impossible to build roads before the rainy weather made the camp a sea of mud.” At Issoudin, Harmon trained on Nieuports. Said to be not the best, nor the worst French fighter of the war, it did fill a gap caused by a shortage of training aircraft. The top speed was little over 100 miles per hour and its ceiling was 17,500 feet; armed with a Vickers machine gun, the Nieuport accounted for its share of enemy aircraft. “The school at Issoudin was primarily intended for advanced and pursuit training .... After a thorough course in advanced flying, the student was carefully drilled in aerobatics, formation flying, and combat, with camera guns installed on machines.” For Harmon, there was more training, this time it was gunnery school at Cazeaux. There was no time for a stateside school to be formed (and not enough instructors, machine guns, or ammunition), so once again, the French provided not only the site, but the guns and instructors also.

Harmon was initially assigned to Romorantin where he tested and ferried DH-4’s from there to other airfields. The DH-4 was the aircraft selected to be built in America and then shipped overseas. “A number of minor changes were necessary in the first airplanes received before they were regarded as entirely fit for service at the front.” Initially built with a Rolls-Royce engine, later versions were supplied with the new “Liberty” engine meant to improve performance. Harmon remained in this capacity for several months before flying combat missions. Originally assigned to the 13th Squadron, 2nd Pursuit Group, he transferred to the 22nd Aero Squadron (“Shooting Stars”) on 8 October 1918 and served with this unit until the armistice. It was shortly after the armistice (on 3 November) that Harmon encountered the German Fokkers near Beaumont France. It was said that the average life span of an aviator at the front was 53 days, but Harmon made it through to the end of the war.

Returning home in 1919, Harmon found employment with Alexander Sprunt and Sons, cotton brokers, but was already talking about returning to Europe, this time to fight for the Poles in their war against Russia. Immediately after WWI, there was much unrest throughout Europe; many countries had been promised the chance for “self-determination.” One of those peoples was the Poles who had long been divided among Austria, Russia and Prussia. U.S. President Woodrow Wilson had favored Polish independence and had even called for “An independent Polish state” in one of his Fourteen Points delivered to Congress in January 1918. The Polish borders were drawn around those areas in which the population was “indisputably Polish in character” except for the border with the Ukraine, Russia, in the throes of a Bolshevik revolution, claimed the Ukraine, and the stage was set for war. It began with a border clash between the Poles and a contingent of Bolshevics in February 1919 near the town of Bereza Kartuska.

First Lieutenant Rorison

Nieuport fighter — “not the best nor the worst”
off for the next several months; the Reds were still consolidating their power and were fighting the White Russians, while the Poles hurried to put together an army. While peace talks went on, nothing was accomplished and in December, collapsed completely. With the defeat of the White Russians, the Communists could now focus attention and military might on the Polish problem. To the Poles, the threat of Bolshevism “added a new dimension of concern to Marshal Pilsudski and his struggling government.” Not only did Poland have to be prepared for an invasion from the east, but the prospects of internal revolt—“the seeds of which were carefully nurtured by Communist agents among the Polish workers[.]”

Harmon C. Rorison by captured Fokker.

Harmon sympathized deeply with the cause of the Poles; while home, “He stated . . . that the American people had no idea of the desperate condition in which Poland was left after the world war and said he could not be satisfied unless he did his part to help her out of her predicament.” He had read of the formation of the Kosciuszko Squadron, a part of the Polish 7th Air Escadrille, consisting of a group of mainly Americans who were flying for Poland. Around August 1919, after visiting his father in Seattle, he: “Traveled 6,000 miles [to France, then to Vienna and on to Warsaw] . . . [and] did not know where the other Yankee aviators were located and had but little idea of how to reach them . . . [but] simply knew they were engaged on the Bolshevik front.” When he arrived in Poland, he was given the rank of lieutenant and was sent on to Lemburg, [Lwow] where he met his squadron commander, Major Cedric E. Fauntleroy. As a lieutenant in the Polish Air Force, he received pay “than is less than that paid an office boy in the United States. Their month-ly wages amount to about $6 and on this pit-tance they are undergoing the hardships of a Russian winter.” There were few complaints, however, and one flier told a reporter, “We came to Poland as soldiers of fortune.” Rorison vowed “to stay in the fight against the bolsheviki just as long as he is needed.”

Former U.S. Army flyer Fauntleroy had met Lieutenant Merian C. Cooper in Paris and (so the story goes), as they sat at a café on the Champ de Elysee watching the Allied victory parade, the talk turned to the Polish-Russian conflict that was brewing. Cooper had been shot down and severely burned during the World War and had spent time in a German POW camp. He had been sent to Poland on behalf of Herbert Hoover’s American Relief Administration and had seen the privations experienced by the Poles, and as he told Fauntleroy, he felt he had a debt to repay. Cooper’s great, great grandfather had fought in the American Revolution with Casimir Pulaski and had been with him when he was mortally wounded. Thus, “Coop” (much as Americans flocked to the Lafayette Escadrille) was one of the first to volunteer to fly for the Poles. There were eight original American members of the squadron and three Poles.

At this time of the Squadron’s formation, there was no fighting to speak of and the men spent their time getting to know the left-over Albatross D.III’s that the fledgling Polish Air Force obtained after the armistice. One flyer, Lt. Edmund P. Graves, was killed on 22 November in an aerobatic show over Lwow, so a new volunteer, Lt. Harmon C. Rorison, was added to the squadron. Added to the inactivity of the war, in January, “snow, rain and sleet [fell] almost continuously for 12 consecutive days” so “training and familiarization missions” were flown when they could be. Even these so-called training missions took their toll on the obsolete aircraft (and the men). There were accidents and crashes, but fortunately no one was seriously injured. The log entries for 17 February reveal that: “Lieut. Clark attempted to take off. His motor failed and he landed in a pile of dismantled hangers. He was uninjured. Lieut. Rorison, trying out heavy prop, hit deep snow, nosed over and broke prop.” On muddy airstrips, oil was applied to the wheels of the planes to permit them to take off. Communication and transport missions were becoming the norm, much to the chagrin of the pilots, but change was in the wind.

On 5 March, the morning fog had dissipated a bit at the Tarnopol (Ternopil in the Ukraine) airfield, so Harmon asked Captain Fauntleroy if he could take his old Albatross up for “a little flip.” Given the okay, “He grinned to his mechanics and ordered them to get his engine started. Then he carefully inspected the ammunition feeds of his guns. ‘Here’s your flying suit and helmet, Sir . . . Would you like us to fill the bomb-racks, too?’ Rorison considered while he climbed into the suit. ‘It hardly seems worth the bother, does it? . . . Oh, well, hang on a couple. Luck might be with me after all.’ A few moments later, when the ship was ready, he climbed into the cockpit, readjusted his extra seat cushions [he needed them to see out the cockpit], and gave her the gun.” Lifting off the airstrip, he could only fly at two to three hundred feet due to the cloud cover, but continued flying eastward. It would fall to Rorison (known in the squadron as “Little Rorry”) to strike the first blow for the flyers. He spotted a “big concentration of Bolshevik troops and three armored trains at Wolpynée and Bar.” He dove on the formation, dropping one 50 kg. bomb on the trains and another on the railroad depot itself. He then machine-gunned the scattering “Bols” (as the men called them) until he was out of ammunition. “One mad little pilot against a thousand or more troopers. . . . Less than ten minutes had elapsed for the entire engagement. The concentration at Wolpynée was smashed. Two bombs and several hundred rounds of machine-gun bullets. Rory licked his lips and chuckled. The Kosciuszko Squadron had met the enemy at last.”

This was the squadron’s first combat action of the war and
Harmon Rorison has the distinction of being the first American aviator to fight Soviet forces! “Little Rory gave the Communists hell!” was the cry heard throughout the Eskadra.

Things were about to change. Unknown to the aviators, Marshall Pilsudski (president of Poland) had formed a fragile union with Ukrainian nationalists, hoping to establish an independent Ukraine to act as a buffer against Russia. He felt the time for action had come. Attacking along a 200 mile front, the Polish army advanced rapidly and was successful beyond their expectations. By May, they had captured Kiev, and as the New York Times reported: “The resistance of the Bolsheviks has been broken in Southern Ukraine. … The Poles have captured 15,000 prisoners, 60 cannon, hundreds of machine guns, and 76 locomotives since their offensive began. … Simultaneously, with the [Polish] cavalry and infantry attacks from the west, Polish armored boats sailed down the Pripet River and met the Bolshevist’s flotilla head on. A pitched battle ensued; two of the Bolshevik's monitors were sunk and four monitors and 40 other boats were captured. The remainder of the Red flotilla retreated. … The Kosciuszko Squadron, composed of American aviators, made 32 raids and some flights more than 60 miles within the Bolshevist lines ... the Americans bombing and machine gunning railroad centres and scattering propaganda in Kiev and other cities. At many points the Bolshevists used anti-aircraft guns against the aviators and in less important places concentrated machine gun fire upon the pilots, who always attacked from an altitude of less than 2,000 feet. Two of the most important raids were led by Lieut. Harmon Rorison of Wilmington, N.C.”

Advancing relentlessly the Poles pushed eastward. Reading their enemy’s radio transmissions, the Poles knew that the Russians planned a counterattack in April, so they attacked first and captured Kiev. Lt. Rorison’s plane was the only one equipped (jury-rigged might be a better description!) with a bomb rack, carrying a 12 kg, (about 26½ pounds) and “Before the enemy recovered sufficiently to retaliate ... the five pilots had splattered the area with more than a thousand rounds ... and ‘Little Rory’s solitary bomb.”

The Soviets, by the spring of 1920, had defeated the “counter-revolutionaries” and were now turning their attention to Poland and the Ukraine. Later that month (May) the Poles encountered the reinforced Russian armies. The Soviets had mustered over 750,000 troops emplaced on two fronts. Facing them in early 1920, the Poles had 500,000 men spread between the two fronts. When the Soviet counter-offensive began, Leon Trotsky declared: “There can be no doubt that the war of the Polish bourgeoisie against the Ukrainian and Russian workers and peasants will end with a workers [sic] revolution in Poland.” Overwhelmed by numbers, the Poles had no recourse but to fall back.

On 24 May, as one historian wrote: “Soviet cavalry, to the number of over 16,000, with 48 cannon, five armoured trains, eight armoured cars and 12 aeroplanes struck at [General Josef] Pilsudski’s right wing[. …] On June 5 the Polish 3rd Army was nearly surrounded” but was barely able to break out. Budienny’s cavalry, the strike force of the Russian southern attack, was moving rapidly from the southeast in an attempt to outflank the Polish forces. They had become “an invincible legendary force” and by 25 August were well on their way to Warsaw. Pilsudski’s comment about the Budienny’s Cossacks was that they were “the motor of the war”, while Rory’s comment was, “Okay, tell the General to bring on his boys!” The ranks of the Soviet cavalry had swelled to nearly 30,000 and seemed to be unstoppable. The Soviet hordes were moving forward at the rate of 20 miles a day.

One of their battle cries was: “Onward to Berlin over the corpse of Poland!” By 2 August, the situation was desperate for the Polish army. The Red army was within 15 miles of Warsaw and preparing for their final assault.

These were very hectic days for the Kosciuszko Squadron. New aircraft were obtained to replace the damaged and older Albatrosses. Rorison and four other pilots were detailed to Warsaw to fly the new aircraft back to the front. The Ansaldo A-1 “Balilla”, as it was nicknamed, was an Italian-built fighter that made its appearance late in the Great War. Speedy (as Harmon found out), several of the Balillas had been purchased by a Polish military committee touring Europe to procure new weapons of war. Ten aircraft were delivered to Warsaw in January 1920 and with their higher speed, increased range (twice that of the Albatross), and Vickers machine guns, they were quickly sent to the front. Pilots liked the plane so more were ordered after most of the initial aircraft were destroyed in the many retreats made by the airmen. Late in April, the machines were ferried back but upon landing, one of the airmen landed atop another Balilla, wrecking both aircraft. More aircraft were sent by rail and Rorison, it was reported, had: “The unenviable opportunity to give each plane its baptismal hop.”

The Russian advance meant that the squadron (many times) had to relocate (read that retreat!) leading to many “close ones” as Harmon related in his letters home: “We have been in many, many tight holes. How we survived being captured (I mean the whole squadron) will always be a mystery to me. Four times we were as good as gone … and each time just as the Bolos took the town, our transport would pull out, and at the last minute our planes would take off. Twice in fact we flew away just as the Bolo cavalry swept onto the field.” On one occasion Cedric Fauntleroy took off to see just how close the enemy horsemen were. He was not gone long and when he returned, he fired his guns along the airstrip. The meaning was clear: get out right away!! Indeed, the Bolos were less than ten miles away. This was one reason airstrips were located near a railway: the repair shops, warehouses and “barracks” were on railroad cars and could be quickly relocated. As the front shifted, everything was packed up and moved as needed. The Kosciuszko Squadron was the first to utilize railroads in this manner.

Many times the squadron hit the Budienny’s “Konarmiya”. These Cossack horsemen of the 1st Cavalry Army, said by Rorison to number anywhere from 18,000 to 24,000, were “Never defeated, [made] 75 miles per day, ate as they rode, slept as they rode too.” They neither asked for nor gave quarter and took no prisoners.

For their part, the Soviet commanders put a price on the fliers’ heads. A bounty of 500,000 rubles was put on Merian Cooper’s head, and it was expected that if captured, the Americans would have been tortured before being executed. For this reason, many of them carried vials of Prussic acid (Rorison did not). Cooper
was eventually shot down and captured but was able to convince his captors that he was only a corporal (which saved his life). Sent to a POW camp near Moscow, he was able to escape several months later (after the war had ended) and made his way to safety. It was said that towards the end of the campaign, the fliers wore “the simplest and oldest clothes they had” so if captured, they could claim to be simple workmen. One of the fliers, George Crawford “was forced down by a defective fuel line, on landing saw a group of Cossacks coming at him. He began to run for the woods but saw that his aircraft was still moving and picking up speed.” He ran back and got into the cockpit, bounced through a wheat field, into and out of a ditch, through a split rail fence and then into the air! Upon landing at his base, he found a piece of the rail fence “‘jammed sideways into his undercarriage.”

Rory found that being of shorter stature sometimes had its advantages when being shot at when he discovered a bullet hole in his flying cap! On one mission it was later found that a bullet had pierced his fuel tank causing the engine to quit. Writing home, he told his relatives, “‘Having been reported ‘missing’ I wanted of course to write immediately and let you know I was O.K. … The Bolsheveki shot me down three days ago by a ball in my gas tank. I landed, jumped in a forest, hid until night and then walked back to our lines about 50 kilometers. … So everything’s going fine.” Mid-May when he was shot down, Rory had been on his third flight of the day in an attempt to locate Budienny’s Cossacks. About to return to his base, he suddenly found he was being fired at by machine guns. His gas tank hit as he attempted to locate the gunners, he switched to his gravity (reserve) tank and “the engine coughed back into action just before he hit the ground. For some much appreciated reason, the Balilla did not catch fire, and Rorison nursed it along over the treetops for several minutes before he brought it down in a small clearing. Just as the plane bounced to a halt, he spotted a cluster of people running toward him, and not being able to determine whether they were curious peasants, Bolshevik soldiers, or friendly partisans, he jumped from the cockpit and dashed into the forest. To prevent identification in case he was captured, he hid all his Polish papers, his recognizable jacket and his military insignia. The men were indeed Bolos; they “came straight on into the woods. There they lost his trail and began beating back and forth through the brush, firing their rifles into every questionable thicket.”

Later, when night came, he started to walk westward with the aid of a small compass. After allowing in the swamp for almost two hours and trudging through the darkness, he saw a small cottage and slowly approached it. He knocked on the door and “Luckily the owner turned out to be a very old peasant who was hardly aware of the war.” The Russian fed him (“some hot barcz soup”) and after a brief rest, Harmon was on his way again. After another close call (he was stopped by a man “who asked in a stern voice for his passport,” Rory feigned ignorance and walked on!) He finally came upon a Polish cavalry unit and after a bit of misunderstanding (they were sure he was a Bolshevi), was allowed to travel with the unit. When the telephone at the airstrip rang to question the airmen if they were “missing a man”, the Polish cavalry officer stated, “We think he may be a Bolshevi.” He went on to describe Rorison, “Red hair, very ragged, short, and quite self-important[,]” Assured that he was indeed a Polish aviator, Rorison was put aboard a train and got back to his base at Belaya Tserkov (Biala Cerkow). Rory later told his squadron mates that at one point the Russians were so close he took out his little pocket dictionary and began to study it in order to be able to converse with the Soviets! His mates did not believe him until he reached in his pocket and produced the book!

When he arrived at the base, he found that the squadron had been “invited to a dance … at the town schoolhouse. Whether or not the tough little North Carolinian had enough energy left for a friendly polka or two was not mentioned in the daily log.”

Harmon had many other “close ones.” On one of his communication missions: “After I’d taken some orders and dropped them to the Colonel of a regiment of cavalry on the battlefield, where at the time a fierce battle was raging, between Pols and Bols, I stuck around just over the heads of the Bols for quite a while. They had 6-77’s there and immediately set all 6 to blaz-ing at me as they seemed to think this offered a better target then the Polish cavalry. They wasted lots of ammunition and as the whole artillery fire of the Bols had been diverted on me, it must have helped the Pols quite a little. Once while back of the Bolo lines I got in a fierce storm, got turned all around in clouds and rains, thought I was headed in the right direction toward our lines (our compasses won’t work at all in the clouds), ran on quite a little ways[,] encountered clouds which seemed absolutely impossible to penetrate and as I was only 50 meters high and over a good field, I almost landed when my wheels almost scrapped a Bolo sentinel’s head, to the tune of machine guns and rifles, I showed the boys a few things in the way of maneuvering and escaped with no damage at all except of course a few holes in the plane. But if I had landed. …”

At the end of May, the squadron again relocated by train, set up a new field and then took to the air for reconnaissance missions. After “a three-hour sortie [Rorison] returned … so benumbed by fatigue that he smashed his landing gear as he bounced his plane heavily onto the field. He was almost giddy from lack of rest as he crawled unhurt from the cockpit. Faunleroy, who was operating on reserve stamina himself, immediately ordered all flyers to lie down somewhere and get some sleep[,]”

“No flying today!” So thought Harmon as he sought to sip a cup of coffee. The sky was overcast and the rain so heavy it appeared that the unit would be grounded. Soon enough, an order for a reconnaissance flight came in and Rory was “elected” to fly it. The rain continued unabated and soon his ignition wiring was saturated. As he wrote home to his folks: “Once while flying in a gale into the wind (said wind about 40 miles per hour) and only 25 meters high from the ground my motor of my Balila [sic] stopped absolutely dead right over a swamp. Now a Balila is one of, if not the fastest machines in the world and lands normally against the wind at about 75 miles per hour (this is a slow landing for a Balila). Well, I was therefore making about 115 miles per hour when I hit the ground and it wasn’t an aviation field but a swamp. When I came to I was about 30 feet from the plane and a Russian was pouring muddy swamp water down my mouth. Luckily it was just within our lines, 2 or 3 minutes later it would have been hard luck.” He did not escape unscathed, however, upon being thrown from the aircraft, he had broken several ribs. Injured as he was, the peasant carried Rory out of the swamp to his cabin. The unknown Russian then wrapped linen around his injured ribs and then fed him “hot semi-acrid beet soup.” “After
resting for a couple of hours, Rory found that by holding his body as steady as possible he could walk.\textsuperscript{[2]} The Russian accompanied him as far as the closest railroad tracks and then left him. Rorison’s luck held out for at the nearby station waited a train and together with two other members of the Squadron also aboard, they made their way back to their base.

With his injured ribs bound in an adhesive plaster, he continued flying but like the others, the constant flying was taking a toll on all of them. This crash, in which he again “rode the plane in” happened early in June. It is apparent that although the men were issued parachutes, due to the low altitudes they flew, they were seldom used. One Squadron member said that “he never saw a military pilot use [a parachute] during his entire service in World War I and in Poland. Mostly they were used for seat cushions.” In Rovy’s case, he utilized several chutes as seat cushions to raise his line of sight while flying!

In his missive home, he also told his relatives of the hardships undergone by the displaced Russian refugees: “One of the pathetic sights is to see a real Russian bourgeois family prepare for the Bolsheviki return to the town (and, by the way, the so-called bourgeois class in Russia is far above that of France, etc.). … In short, the Russian bourgeois are the cultivated, often wealthy people, but without titles. Of course all titled people have long ago either left Russia or been killed, and so the Bolsheviks must now spend their wrath on the next class, the bourgeois. And so the bourgeois, knowing the Bolsheviks will take the town say the next day, immediately set to work preparing. This means hiding in the cellar or garret; all hats for girls or women, all stockings, if the family is lucky enough to have any (most haven’t) take off all table cloths, take down all curtains, put away all eating utensils, except one fork, spoon, knife, glass, plate, etc., for each person. Likewise with chairs, take down all pictures, throw trash and dirty rags, etc., on the floor (spitting helps a little), of course, get rid of all jewelry, etc., etc. … I’ve been in many beautiful chateaus and castles, all of course deserted and absolutely wrecked inside.” There also were “terrible and cruel barbarous crimes committed by [the] enemy. … Suffice it to say that the substance of what the newspapers say is true—not only true, but in reality is much worse, as papers would not be allowed to print the whole truth.”

One report not told by Rorison was the burning of a field hospital by the Cossack “horsearmy” “together with 600 wounded Polish soldiers inside.”

When Rorison wrote this letter to his relatives (28 June 1920), he was on a furlough in Lwow. After two and a half months of combat flying, the men of the squadron, like their aircraft, were pretty well worn out and had been allowed a little “R and R”. It wouldn’t last long because the situation at the front was rapidly deteriorating and it now looked as though Poland had lost the war. But General Pilsudski had an audacious plan which went into effect just before the Russian onslaught. He realized that the Soviet supply line was stretched severely thin, plus, Ukrainian nationalists had been active behind the Bolos lines, so some Bolo troops had been dispatched to quell those disturbances; after all, the Soviet High Command believed, Warsaw was just about taken. On 17 August the Poles counterattacked and once again drove the Communists back. They advanced over 150 miles in just a few days.

The Kosciuszko Squadron continued their attacks during these desperate times. They “developed a tactic of low-altitude machine gun strafing runs” and the Polish ground commanders “highly valued the contributions of the Kosciuszko Squadron.” One reported, “The American pilots, though exhausted, fight tenaciously. During the last offensive, their commander attacked enemy formations from the rear, raining machine gun bullets down on their heads. Without the American pilots help, we would long ago have been done for.” In August 1920, the squadron “took part in the defense of Lwow [also spelled Lvov] and after the battle of Warsaw, it participated in the battle of Komorow.” August 16th and 17th the squadron was “reduced to five uninjured pilots” who made “eighteen ground attacks each day.” It was this battle, Komorow [also spelled Komorov], said to have been one of the largest cavalry battles in world history, that crippled Budienny’s cavalry. With few aircraft, the Soviets were vulnerable to constant air attack. Pinning down this large cavalry force was said to have played a major part in the winning of the war: “[A] factor that influenced the outcome of the war was the effective neutralization of Budyonny’s 1st Cavalry Army, much feared by Pilsudski and other Polish commanders, in the battles around Lwow.” The Poles pushed the Soviets back beyond their borders and an armistice was signed on 18 October 1920, although a formal peace treaty (the Treaty of Riga) was not signed until March 1921.

The men of the Kosciuszko Squadron had played a large part in the winning of that war (they flew over 400 combat missions in less than a year) and were awarded Poland’s highest decoration, the Virtuti Militari. In a stateside ceremony, Harmon received his award along with Kenneth Shrewsbury in Washington, D.C. Ignace Paderewski, Prince Lubomirski, and U.S. General Pershing were among those present. Harmon Rorison had served the Poles for at least eight months. His six month contract had expired, but he remained on for at least another two months. One report indicated that he had not recovered from the effects of his last crash in which his ribs were broken. The Polish-Russian War took the lives of more than 50,000 Poles and anywhere from 100,000 to 150,000 Soviets, but established the modern state of Poland.

Harmon Chadbourn Rorison
Part II

Returning to his hometown of Wilmington, North Carolina, Harmon settled into civilian life. Initially he was back with Alexander Sprunt and Sons, but soon entered the banking business, working for the Citizen’s Bank. He would work for two other institutions, the Murchison Bank and as cashier for the North Carolina Bank and Trust Company. During the depression that struck America in the early 1930’s, the N.C.B.&T. went under and Harmon was appointed “Assistant Conservator” of the bank’s assets by the state commissioner of banks. The bank was reorganized as the Security National Bank, and he became the Wilmington unit’s “vice-president and city executive” and was (in 1943) elected to the board of directors; he would hold this position until he retired from the bank then known as the N.C. National bank in 1958. Shortly after escaping from the Soviets, Merian Cooper wrote to his friend: “One of my biggest regrets is that I couldn’t see you here in Warsaw when I came out. … So you are a banker now. How the mighty have fallen! (But I reckon there is fun in every game if you play it right.) I suppose you will be running out in one of your twelve limousines to the small-
comrade well, Cooper ended with an apology, “Pardon this pencil, but I don’t own a pen.”"

On 31 January 1924, Harmon married Miss Margaret Devereux Lippitt at St. James Episcopal Church and forever after, Harmon would refer to that date in letters and notes to his wife, as “The Day of Days.” Two children would come of this union, Margaret L. (born 1926) and Mary Ann (born 1934). The good times were tempered by the death of his father, Richard, who died in Seattle in August 1926. In the summer of 1929, he traveled to New York City to await the arrival of a former squadron mate, Major Ludwik Idzikowski, who was attempting to cross the Atlantic. The Major never arrived; he “was killed in an explosion following a forced landing near Horta, Azores.”

Harmon remained active in military and aviation affairs during this period. He was promoted to the rank of Major in the Air Service Reserves in April 1924 and later commanded the 81st Division Air Service reserves. His aviation license listed him not only as an airplane pilot, but as an Aero Club Expert and a Polish military aviator. He gave talks to local groups on his experiences, illustrating them with photos he had taken during the wars. As war clouds descended once again over Europe in 1938, he was placed in charge of the various observation points from which his men would watch the “joint anti-aircraft and air corps exercise at Fort Bragg.” It was not only a test of the readiness of the army, but also of the city and its air-raid warning network.

When war broke out between England, France, and Germany, Harmon became the treasurer of the local committee of the British War Relief Society. Not content to be on the sidelines when America was attacked, he “dyed his hair, lied about his age” and even concealed his severe asthma when he went before the examiners for the American Field Service. Accepted as an ambulance driver, in 1943 he was sent overseas and served with the British Eighth Army in North Africa and Italy, with the First French Army in France and Germany. He was assigned to different units and worked with Scots, Australians, New Zealanders, South Africans, Alpini, Gurkhas, as well as Algerians and Moroccans.

While with the different units, he served at Monte Casino, St. Ella, and the Rimini offensive (1944). He even served with the Polish Fifth Division in the Galetia-Predappio attack in Italy. What memories that service must have brought back! In several letters written home, (many via “V-mail”), Harmon kept his family aware of where he was. One such missive written from Italy in June 1944 told about a carton of Lucky Strike cigarettes that he had brought overseas. As a non-smoker, they were given away, “usually one cigarette at a time, never over two, to wounded soldiers I was bringing out. They gave untold pleasure, as a matter of fact, most of them went to the Indians (they being the first front assistants I had) when I first got here. The Gurkhas… got most of them and how they did enjoy them.” Interestingly, in the same letter, he mentioned that “A guy from our headquarters came by the other day and said Umberto had asked about me some time ago … I can say I think he, regardless of other angles, whether stronger or weaker, is definitely Anti-Fascist. Individually he is now ‘Prince of the Realm’ as you probably know, and as such head of the Eye-Tye government although the old boy [King Victor Emmanuel] still has the title of ‘King’.” The “Umberto” mentioned was the son of King Victor Emmanuel.

In an undated letter, also from Italy, Harmon asked to be excused for his writing as, “Jerry shot one rather close to the ambulance and I ducked …. Jerry has been shelving us right steadily tonight but it has eased off now. Anyhow [he] hasn’t bombed us tonight.” Another letter written on Christmas Day, 1945, described seeing an Italian mother with her two daughters, ages six and ten, for whom the day had little meaning, as the war had taken everything. Having just received a package from home, he asked the mother if she could get a couple of stockings. When produced, he filled them with treats and sweets so Christmas would not “be just another day for them.” Surely his thoughts were of his own two young daughters at home.

In a following V-mail letter dated mid-January, he told his little family, “Your Christmas boxes are still being enjoyed” and went on to talk about the British unit he was serving with: “This is some outfit I’m out here with, Tough boys. My orderly is named ‘Butch’ and he is a former prize fighter, been in army five years … As one corporal says, ‘Butch hasn’t a rugby mind.’ But he is OK. He says of the cold here, ‘It’s wicked it is.’ I won’t tell you what he says of Jerry, especially when its ‘hot’.”

As the war ended, his A.F.S. unit found itself near Stuttgart, Germany. Billeted in a castle, Harmon was observed by the owner’s maid sipping his wine, apparently unlike the other members there, so he was invited to join the owners in their section of the castle and a friendship was struck up. Soon Mrs. Rorison, back in North Carolina, was sending them tins of food, jelly and nylons. Upon his return in 1945, he again took his post at the bank and, in the years to come, became a pillar of the community. In December 1957, he was appointed a board member (Board no. 66) of the Selective Service System by the President of the United States. In December 1957, Harmon retired from the National Security Bank, “in keeping with Security’s mandatory requirement upon reaching the age of sixty-five.”

Harmon C. Rorison fell ill with cancer and after a long battle with the wasting disease, succumbed on 27 February 1976 and is buried in Wilmington’s Oakdale Cemetery.
On 16 March 2013, The Department of North Carolina, Sons of the Union Veterans of the Civil War, dedicated a monument to the Union Soldiers of the 14th, 15th, 17th, and 20th Corps, who served with Major General William T. Sherman’s army during the time of the Battle of Bentonville.

This project has taken several years to bring to the dedication, and a number of individuals and organizations were responsible. The Department of NC, SUVCW, formed a Monument Committee which was able to develop a design, guide it through State regulations and bureaucracy, and have it placed on the battlefield.

Speakers taking place in the ceremony included Donny Taylor, Bentonville Battlefield Site Manager; Dr. Gerard Devine, Commander of the Department of North Carolina; Keith Hardison, Director of the State Historical Sites; and Mark Day, representing the National Commander of the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War.

Denny Taylor remarked that while it had been 148 years since the battle, it was 118 years since the first marker was placed on the site. Dr. Devine described the events leading up to the battle, the battle itself, and the aftermath. Special mention was made of the Cape Fear Living History Society and the Bentonville Battlefield Historical Association which donated funds for the Monument. These funds had been held in trust from fundraising efforts during the 1990s for a monument to the Union troops.

Mr. Hardison noted that General Joseph E. Johnston and Sherman later became friends and Johnston caught a bad cold, which caused his death, because he refused to cover his head while serving as a pallbearer at Sherman’s funeral. He said that, therefore, he believed that Johnston would approve of the placing of this monument on the field. Mr. Day brought greetings from the National Commander of the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War, Perley Mellor. He stated that it was especially significant for him to be here as his ancestor was here with the 150th New York Infantry in the 20th Corps. The ceremony was capped with the unveiling of the Monument, the skirl of bagpipes playing “Amazing Grace”, and Taps played by a U.S. Army Sergeant. Re-enactors clad in the blue and the gray rendered artillery and infantrysalutes.

Dennis St. Andrew, Commander of the Major General Thomas H. Ruger Camp #1, Sons of the Union Veterans of the Civil War, located in Fayetteville stated that the placement of this Monument means that the Union soldiers at Bentonville are finally being recognized for their service.

USCG Cutter Modoc and the Bismarck

USCG Cutter Modoc (WPG-46) was commissioned on 14 January 1922, one of four cutters of the Tampa class. She had a displacement of 1,506 tons, her main armaments were a pair of 5-inch deck guns, and she was manned by 12 officers and 78 men (increased to 110 men in 1945). She was named in honor of the Modoc Indian tribe of the northwest United States.

Designed for multi-missions, she was home ported in Wilmington. It was the only home port she would ever know. In 1923, Modoc began service with the International Ice Patrol where she shared duties with other cutters in the Atlantic for the next 18 years. After war began in Europe, an additional duty was to rescue convoy survivors of U-boat attacks.

On 18 May 1941, Modoc, commanded by LCDR Harold Belford, rendezvoused with Northland, commanded by CDR Edward “Iceberg” Smith, for a conference and to exchange mail bags. A few hours later, an urgent message was received reporting the loss of several merchant ships from a U-boat wolf pack attack. Despite the fact that finding survivors was very unlikely due to stormy weather and frigid waters, the Modoc and Northland set course for the area from which the plea for help originated. Although some floating debris was found in the area, no survivors were located. Modoc then responded to another call for help from the Marconi about 100 miles south. Northland remained in the area, while a smaller cutter, General Greene, was dispatched to assist Modoc. The weather had turned worse with heavy seas and snow, reducing visibility to near zero. As before, no survivors were located.

By Sunday, 24 May, conditions had improved with visibility approximately six miles and calming seas. That afternoon, the off duty crewmen gathered on the mess deck to watch a movie. It was near the end of the watch for LTJG George Boyce and LTJG Richard Bacchus, when the lookouts alerted them to the appearance of a huge grey warship about six miles ahead. The signalman aboard Modoc flashed recognition but received none from the unknown ship. Meanwhile the captain ordered a pair of American flags spread out on the forecastle and fantail.

There was still no reply from what was now recognized as a battleship as it passed across the bow of the Modoc and continued on the port side of the cutter. The cutter’s crew swarmed onto the weather deck to stare at the ship. Moments later several Swordfish aircraft with British markings appeared, seemingly dropping out of the clouds, almost directly overhead.

Bismarck’s anti-aircraft guns opened fire on the planes which were lining up for a torpedo attack—the Modoc had stumbled...
into the midst of *HMS Ark Royal*’s air attack on the German battleship, *Bismarck*, which now opened fire on the British biplanes. General Quarters was sounded, watertight doors were secured, and the crew manned all guns in preparation for action.

Ralph Moore, who grew up in Morehead City, was stationed below decks that day but had gone top side to empty the trash, enabling him to see the planes. Interviewed after the war by Peter Mitchell, staff-writer for the *Wilmington Morning Star*, Moore stated, “I could see shells bursting in air. I didn’t have an inkling of what was going on.”

The British aviators scored a hit on the German battleship, braving a barrage of anti-aircraft fire that came frightening close to the *Modoc*’s bow. Orders were issued and *Modoc* turned away from the danger at flank speed, about 14 knots; however, she was not out of danger yet.

Shortly *Modoc* encountered the British warships pursuing *Bismarck*, including *HMS Dorsetshire*, *HMS Rodney*, *HMS King George V*, *HMS Suffolk*, and *HMS Prince of Wales*. Believing *Modoc* to be a hostile target, *HMS Norfolk* made preparations to fire. Thankfully *Prince of Wales* recognized the vessel as being a US Coast Guard cutter and quickly relayed this information to *Norfolk*, narrowly averting a tragedy.

When “Iceberg” Smith learned of the incident, he commented, “It is indeed fortunate that there were no accidents or mistakes when all parties were more or less on a hair trigger.”

Though *Modoc* found no survivors on this mission, *General Green* rescued 29 men in two lifeboats from the *Marconi*. She was transferred to the U.S. Navy on 1 November 1941 with orders to do “a little of everything”, *Modoc* and many of the Coast Guard’s older, smaller and slower cutters were assigned to the Greenland Ice Patrol. They endured much discomfort amid the dangers of fog, storms, ice and German raiders, but their work was vital to the war effort in the Atlantic. When a British ship hit an iceberg and sank on 21 January 1943, *Modoc* was able to rescue 128 survivors.

On 28 December 1947, at war’s end, *Modoc*, which had earned a battle star, was returned to the Treasury Department. Decommissioned in 1947, she was registered in Ecuador and served as a merchantman until scrapped in 1964. But for a brief time in March 1941, she made an interesting footnote to North Carolina’s military history.

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**Soldier’s Creed**

I am an American Soldier.

I am a Warrior and a member of a team. I serve the people of the United States and live the army Values.

I will always place the mission first.

I will never accept defeat.

I will never quit.

I will never leave a fallen comrade.

I am disciplined, physically and mentally tough, trained and proficient in my warrior tasks and drills.

I always maintain my arms, my equipment and myself.

I am an expert and I am a professional.

I stand ready to deploy, engage, and destroy the enemies of the United States of America in close combat.

I am guardian of freedom and the American way of life.

I am an American Soldier.
Speaking for all North Carolina Military Historical Society members, I thank the authors of the stories included in the Fall 2013 Recall. Your story contributions made possible this publication. The time you have dedicated to research and writing is appreciated. We need more writers to step up to the plate, so that we can continue with our publication. Looking forward to the Spring 2014 Recall, my cupboard is bare. We need stories.

On Veterans’ Day this year, 11 November, we remember David L. Hardee and Harmon C. Rorison, whose WWI combat stories are included in this Recall. Before we were born, these gentlemen were in combat during World War I. Amazingly, about the time some of us teenagers were starting into our first World War II experience, Hardee and Rorison are again in combat during World War II. We are proud of them.

I recommend that you consider membership in the Army Historical Foundation. The Army Historical Foundation’s purpose and mission is to build the National Museum of the U.S. Army which will be located at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. Despite the fact that the Army is the oldest of the military services, it is the only one without a National Museum. With our help the Foundation is about to change that. The address of the Army Historical Foundation is P. O. Box 96703, Washington, DC 20090-6703.

Someone asked me about the Tack Room picture in this column. Well, it was taken the day of my retirement, 1 November 1973—forty years ago. Reminds me how life was. Someone asked me how I came up with the dumb name, Editor’s Tack Room. Well, for those who do not know, a tack room is a place that contains equipment, grooming supplies, and stuff needed to work with horses. My editor’s tack room contains materials, supplies, and stuff needed to prepare this publication. It also contains your 91-year-old Editor. Reminds me of a toast, “Here’s to us and those like us. There aren’t many left.”

Photos, Interviews Sought To Document Tar Heel Military Experience

In 1998, the N.C. Division of Archives and History began Phase III of its effort to better document the state’s 20th century military experience. Previous phases have focused on the period from 1900 through the end of the Korean War. Though still actively collecting and preserving items from this era, the Archives is seeking to honor North Carolina veterans who served North Carolina and the nation from 1954 through the present.

The Military History Collection Project also is engaged in an extensive oral history program. People around the state are encouraged to tape interviews with veterans of all time periods and services for deposit in the Military Collection of the State Archives. If you have items to share, please mail them to or contact: Ken Simpson, Coordinator, Military Collection Project, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, 109 East Jones Street, Raleigh, N.C. 27601-2807; or call 919-807-7314.

In this issue …

15 Days in the Meuse-Argonne Forest ...................... 1
Prison Life Made Him Tougher ............................. 1
A Tarheel’s Thoughts on Gettysburg ....................... 9
Just a Common Soldier ....................................... 10
The Story Behind the Stone ................................. 11
Women Workers in the Fayetteville Arsenal ............. 13
Harmon Chadbourn Rorison ................................. 15
Union Soldiers Recognized ................................. 22
USCG Cutter Modoc and the Bismarck ................. 22
Editor’s Tack Room ......................................... 24