



Photos contributed

This is an example of a Distinguished Cross citation Pvt. Benjamin Smith would have been awarded. This citation was awarded to Capt. Ben F. Dixon, who was killed in action during the same battle to break the Hindenburg Line.

The World War I story of Pvt. Benjamin Bantie Smith of Ash

By NORMA ECKARD
SPECIAL TO THE BEACON

Benjamin Bantie Smith was born and raised in Brunswick County. There is a partial family tree in FamilySearch. His World War I draft registration from June 5, 1917, shows he was single and working on his family's farm.

Smith was one of 16 Brunswick County men ordered to report for duty Sept. 19, 1917. Included were John Carlisle, Samuel G. Fulford, James R. Ganey and William P. Comron/Cameron, who were all eventually assigned to 119th Infantry, 30th "Old Hickory" Division, to train at Camp Sevier in Greenville, S.C.

Previous posts described events up to and including the Hindenburg Line assault. This account of the assault can be found in the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources blog:

At 5:50 a.m. on the morning of Sept. 29, 1918, the North Carolinians of the 30th Division, then serving under British command as part of the Fourth Army, emerged from the safety of their trenches and formed up in a single line, each man standing shoulder to shoulder, roughly four to six feet apart.

As they moved across the field under a cacophony of machine gun and artillery fire, the men did their best to stay abreast and maintain unit cohesion. Because of the poor visibility, the difficult nature of the terrain, and battlefield obstacles, however, the lines began to waver almost immediately. Enemy artillery fire punched at the Allied lines as a thick cloud of fog and smoke enveloped the field. "You could hardly see your hand before you," remembered Luther Hall, a Surry County native attached to the 119th Infantry Regiment.

Smith died later from wounds received that day. According to history, 119th Infantry, 60th Brigade, 30th Division, U.S.A. Operations in Belgium and France, 1917-1919, the casualties the 119th Infantry reported that day were: 146 killed in action, 691 wounded, 16 died of wounds, 37 taken prisoner and 12 missing in action.

Also included was this description: The field over which this fight took place on the 30th day of September presented a miserable appearance, as dead soldiers were scattered broadcast over its area. Shell holes were so numerous that one could not walk three steps without falling into one. Huge masses of barbed wire had been partly cut by the bombardment and the tanks. Not a telephone pole nor a tree had been left standing by the sweeping artillery fire. The town of Bellicourt was a complete wreck.

Smith died of his wounds on Oct. 17, 1918, more than two weeks after the Hindenburg Line assault.

On Nov. 18, 1918, he was recom-

mended for both a British and American military medal. Pvt. Benjamin Smith was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross by the United States Army for great bravery in battle. His North Carolina World War I service card and page 8 of the 119th Infantry military honors recommendations list shows he was also awarded the British Military Medal.

On July 8, 1918, Congress approved an act permitting members of the military forces of the United States serving in the World War to accept and wear certain foreign decorations.

An account of his bravery can be found in a North Carolina Armistice Day program in 1921 (Source: North Carolina Day. Friday, Nov. 11, 1921. Armistice Day. North Carolina in the World War; North Carolina. Dept. of Public Instruction): Benjamin B. Smith, private, Company A, 119th Infantry. For extraordinary heroism in action near Bellicourt, France, September 29, 1918. After being wounded twice in making attacks with his own organization, he joined Australian troops and attacked with them, being wounded a third time before he consented to be evacuated.

Included in the program is this table:
North Carolina's War Record
73,000 men in the Army.
9,000 men in the Navy and Marine Corps.

1,600 men gave their lives.
1 man awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.
200 men awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.
12 men awarded the Distinguished Service Medal.

The 1921 NC Armistice Day program ended with this dedication: Eighty-two thousand North Carolinians fought in the war. One thousand six hundred of these gave their lives in battle. These are the men whom we should especially honor today. Someday their names and homes will all be known. But scholars will have to work a long time to get them all right. In the meantime you should learn as many as you can of the men from your own county who died. Their names should be read on Armistice Day, and hymns sung and prayers offered in their memory. Some of these men have been brought back from France and are now buried in their home cemeteries. Their graves should be visited this day, and decorated with flowers. Remember that these men died for us, and honor them always.

The remains of Smith were returned from Belgium on the USAT Wheaton on July 2, 1921. He was laid to rest in the Smith Family Cemetery on N.C. 130 in Ash. His headstone is not a military one but includes the inscription: "Served with honor in the World War and died in the Service of his country."

If you would like to help us honor



Pvt. Benjamin B. Smith of Ash



Army Distinguished Service Cross



British Military Medal

Smith or another Brunswick County World War I veteran, go to caswellriflerange.com or email ftcaswellriflerange@gmail.com.

A monument will be placed at the site of the rifle range in Caswell Beach Veterans' Day 2018 in honor of the men and women from Brunswick County who served their country. A book is to be published in 2019 containing all 725 names, as well as a historical overview of the 1918 World War I Rifle Range Target Pit Storage Room.

Norma Eckard of Caswell Beach is president of Friends of Fort Caswell Rifle Range Inc.