



Images contributed

1920 Hindenburg Line model

The World War I profile of Pvt. Hanson Hilliard Leonard

BY NORMA ECKARD
SPECIAL TO THE BEACON

Hanson Hilliard Leonard was born and raised in Brunswick County. A partial family tree is located in Family Search. Hanson had a brother who also served, Stacy Harvey Leonard.

Hanson's 1917 Draft Registration Card shows he was single and working as a farm hand for Hiram McKeithan in Southport.

Hanson was ordered to report to duty April 2, 1918. On April 26, he was assigned to Company I, 120th Infantry, 30th "Old Hickory" Division.

Previous posts describe activities until Sept. 1, 1918, when Pvt. Edward Mills was wounded. A few days later, the British relieved the regiment.

Sept. 5 and 6 were devoted to cleaning up. The entire regiment was deloused and bathed at Kill Bug Station and Hop Factory, each man receiving a clean suit of underwear. After a period in the line, the little bugs were plentiful.

The regiment trained until the end of September, when the 30th Division broke the Hindenburg Line. While Pvt. Leonard's North Carolina Service Card shows he was wounded Sept. 19, the Official History of the 120th Infantry does not seem to indicate an opportunity. More telling is that the document does not include a list of wounded for the dates Sept. 5-29. While it is possible that his wounds were received on Sept. 19, it is more likely that he was wounded during the breaking of the Hindenburg Line.

The night of Sept. 23, 1918, the division was transferred to the 4th British Army, commanded by General Rawlinson. No one knew what was to take place, but each man in the regiment felt the time had come for the regiment to prove its worth.

The regiment was formed in columns of twos on the road between Acheux and Forceville. Lorry after lorry rolled into place, and at 8 p.m., all troops were embussed and ready to move into the night.

All night long the movement continued through Albert, Peronne, Doingt, and along the marshy Somme. With the sky growing lighter in the east, the regiment debussed at Cartigny and marched to Tincourt. Once more, the flash of guns and the burst of "Very lights" could be seen.

The same day the regiment was joined by a detail of Australian officers and men, who were to give whatever assistance the regiment might need; and from these Australians more was learned in the short period they were with the regiment, particularly as regards the rationing of troops in the line, than in the entire period of training.

In the afternoon, the regiment marched to Hervilly. Regiment-

tal headquarters was in the side of a sunken road. The troops were scattered wherever room could be found, the mass of artillery, infantry, and cavalry filling the entire country.

The Regiment learned that in front of it lay the hitherto impregnable positions of the Hindenburg Line, against which many fruitless attacks had been made; that the British Army had been given the task of fighting the only decisive battle in the World War; that the place of honor in this attack between Cambria and St. Quentin had been given the 4th British Army; that the 30th Division, as part of the 4th British Army, would attack in the center with the 46th British on the right and the 27th American on the left; that the 119th and 120th Infantry Regiments had been selected to do the job, with the 117th Infantry to follow and attack to the right after crossing the Canal, and 118th Infantry as Divisional Reserve.

This regiment's sector of the Hindenburg System consisted of three rows of heavy barbed wire, woven so thick as to resemble a mass of vines and briars intermingled: each row was from 30 to 40 feet in depth, and to which the artillery fire did but little damage; three rows of the Hindenburg trenches, on which four years of work had been spent; and the backbone of the entire system, Bellicourt, the St. Quentin Canal Tunnel. This canal passed for a distance of 6,000 yards underground from Le Catlet on the north to Requival on the south.

The Great Napoleon had built it, and in some places was 193 feet underground. The Germans filled the canal with barges, lighted it with electric lights, and fitted it with dressing stations. On the barges accommodations were provided for a division of troops, where they could rest secure from any shellfire.

The end of the tunnel had been closed with ferro-concrete walls with openings left for machine gun. To the trench system and to the town of Bellicourt, overhead, ran concrete tunnels through which troops could move to reinforce the front line or to occupy the prepared positions in Bellicourt; the Catlet-Nauroy Line, a supporting system; and the village of Nauroy, which had been prepared for defense.

Over the entire area were machine guns without number, not only the probable approaches, but also every inch of front was covered by one or more guns.

The Germans believed the position could not be taken, and even when lost, prisoners would not believe it to be possible, and laughed at those who would tell them.

It was the turning point of the war.

Between Sept. 29 and Oct. 1, 1918, the three days of the Hin-

American expeditionary forces:
Wounded (degree undetermined) 276
Wounded slightly 413
Total 689
Corporals.
William M. Fine, Mrs. Jane Fine,
251 South Preston street, Spartanburg,
S. C.
Broadus E. Hunter, Mrs. W. O.
Hunter, 917 East Whites street, Rock
Hill, S. C.
Edward R. Sanders, John E.
Sanders, Kline, S. C.
Privates.
Hanson H. Leonard, Henry Leonard,
Shalotte, N. C.

A clipping from The Charlotte News, Feb. 8, 1919

denburg Assault, the following 120th Infantry casualties were reported: 202 killed in action and 759 wounded.

Many months later, Pvt. Hanson Leonard returned on USS Martha Washington with his regiment in early April 1919, and was honorably discharged on April 18, 1919, with no disability. Nothing is known about his wound or recovery.

He married in 1928. The 1930 Census showed he was the father of two stepchildren. His life ended suddenly in 1936 at 47. The 1940 Census shows he and his widow had at least one child together.

Hanson Hilliard Leonard was laid to rest in Pender County, where he was living at the time. There is no picture of his gravesite but an application for a military headstone was submitted and approved.

Information regarding the 120th Infantry was gathered from Official History of the 120th Infantry 3rd North Carolina 30th Division, from Aug. 5, 1917, Canal Sector Ypres-Lys Offensive Somme Offensive.

Stacy Leonard's North Carolina World War I Service Card shows he was a Private in 156 Depot Brigade. The Depot Brigades were to receive, train, equip, and forward replacements (both officers and enlisted men) to replacement divisions of the corps. Yet his military headstone lists "Pfc. Col., 20th Infantry." Why the discrepancy?

Luckily, Pvt. 1st Class Stacy Leonard's military headstone application was available on ancestry.com. The back shows that he enlisted in the National Guard on Jan. 20, 1917, and was honorably discharged Sept. 16, 1917, with a Surgeon's Certificate of Disability (SCD). He was then ordered to duty (for the draft) Aug. 25, 1918. He served until Dec. 6, 1918, when he was honorably discharged.

His injury or illness in 1917 had to have been recoverable as he passed the physical examination a year later and was accepted for duty. Unless it was a service related disability, he would not have received mili-

tary disability in 1917.

This explained the discrepancy. As the highest rank achieved is credited, the Brunswick County Army/Marine World War I Veterans-Units, Dates Served was updated to reflect Pvt. 1st Class. The units and dates served were modified to include both sets of service.

If you would like to help us honor Brunswick County World War I veterans, go to caswellriflerange.com or email fcaswellriflerange@gmail.com. Three hundred fifty Brunswick County World War I veterans have been honored to date.

A monument was 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, "To All Those Who Served in World War I from Brunswick County, N.C.," is to be published during 2019 containing all 724 names, as well as a historical overview of the 1918 World War I Rifle Range Target Pit Storage Room.

We would like the public to review the names of the following Brunswick County men who died during World War I to make certain they have not forgotten anyone who may have perished or missed someone while researching names that should be on this list.

Killed in action: Pvts. 1st Class Walter S. Brock and Erastus I. Nelson, Pvts. Harvey T. Chadwick, Jimmie Griffin and Harry L. Pigott, Cpl. Herbert B. Ward

Died of wounds: Pvts. William C. Hewett and Benjamin B. Smith

Died of Disease: Pvts. William F. Brooks, Carl J. Danford, Manning Hall, Claudie H. McCall, Elijah Milliken, Kendrick W. Outlaw, Cecil S. Pierce, Samuel C. Swain, Guy E. Watson, David Williams and Fred Wilson, Pvt. 1st Class John W. Carlisle, David L. Doshier (cook), Seaman James C. Edwards, Sgt. Robert G. Farmer

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



Photos contributed

The Willetts family: Front row from left are Fredrick Arnold Willetts and William Edgar Willetts; back row from left are William Henry Willetts, George Finnis Willetts (in uniform) and sister Zelpia Eunity Willetts.

Earp speaks about Willetts family at DAR meeting

Mary Earp gave a speech after presenting the Friends of Fort Caswell Rifle Range with a \$500 donation at a recent DAR meeting, sharing her thoughts about the Honor a Brunswick County World War I Veteran program to raise funds for the World War I memorial at the 1918 Fort Caswell Rifle Range in Caswell Beach. Members of the Willetts family contributed to the fund.

"Few people know about this war and the sacrifices that were made. It is our responsibility to educate family members and the community," Earp told the groups. She spoke about the formation of the Daughters of the American Revolution chapter in Brunswick County, as she was one of the early members. They struggled through those first years, but have now created a strong base of members. The Brunswick Town Chapter supported the stabilization of the rifle range and now the honoring of Brunswick County World War I veterans.

Earp said her involvement in the DAR came naturally, as her family always emphasized the importance of serving their country at home and in the service. Her father and brothers led by example. Her nieces are also members of the DAR in their communities.

Later, she shared this photo of her father and his siblings. "My family was poor and those clothes are not indicative of how they lived," she said. "I have been told that the traveling photographer rented clothes."

Earp first contacted Friends of Fort Caswell Rifle Range in March. She continues to reach out to others in the community to inform and update them about the memorial to honor the county's World War I veterans. Donations continue to be received by the Willetts family.