



Photo contributed by Gwen Causey

Henry Lindon Clemmons, center, is shown with the six other men — Luther J. Inman, Owen R. Mintz, Willie H. Hewett, Robert W. Holden, Mack Leonard and Issac Fred Edge — from Brunswick County who were ordered to report for duty Oct. 15, 1917.



Photo contributed

Beau Desert Hospital Center (aerial view)

The World War I profile of Bugler Willie Hasper Hewett

BY NORMA ECKARD
SPECIAL TO THE BEACON

Willie Hasper Hewett was born and raised in Brunswick County. His family tree is in Family Search.

Willie's World War I draft registration shows he was single, living in Shallotte and working as a barber, farmer and laborer in Supply and Shallotte for his parents and himself. He was described as medium height, weight, with blue eyes and light hair. He was ordered to report for duty Oct. 15, 1917, with the other six men shown in the photograph contributed by Gwen Causey, granddaughter of Henry Lindon Clemmons. All were sent to Camp Jackson, S.C., officially accepted Oct. 26 and then assigned to Company F, 322nd Infantry, 81st "Wildcat" Division (Robert Holden and Owen Mintz would be reassigned before leaving for Europe, while Isaac Edge was honorably discharged with a disability in December 1917).

Willie served as a bugler. Brunswick County had four known buglers; all served overseas. Two were wounded.

The 81st Division completed their operations at the St. Die sector and then left Oct. 19, 1918, at 2:30 a.m. They hiked 50 kilometers in two days with full packs, then rested and trained for their entrance in the Meuse-Argonne offensive.

Passing through St. Mihiel gave the division their first view of the destruction in France. Reading the entries in the diary of Thomas Shinn helps us understand their experience as they marched through the countryside:

Monday, Nov. 3, 1918

We passed through St. Mihiel which was once a beau-

tiful city but now hardly a stone was left unmoved.

Churches and school buildings were piled up as a whirlwind piles up loose sand in March. Great steel manufacturing plants looked as tho' a flood had struck them. Great fields which had once supplied France with grain are now covered in barbed wire and shell craters. Great forests which would have supplied France with wood to burn and lumber to build were [illegible] down as a mower cuts his hay.

The closer they moved to the front, the more detailed the diary entries became:

Tuesday, Nov. 5, 1918

Eight o'clock caught us hiking again. It was a long hard hike and we didn't have much to eat.

We were entertained in the daytime by air battles between planes, at night by the flash of guns and the pretty colored flares that signify orders for the artillery.

I went 6 weeks without pulling off my clothes and 35 days without pulling off my shoes and had cooties on me at the same time but that's not a disgrace for every soldier has them on the front. He doesn't have time to think of clothes baths beds or how deep the mud is but he only wonders how he can save his skin and kill the Hun.

They arrived in Verdun, a town that was previously home to 25,000 but was now "torn to pieces, not a wall was left standing." The 81st Division was to relieve the 35th Division.

At 10 p.m., they were called to move into the reserve trenches. Called the "Underground city of Verdun," it had never been taken by the Germans.

Thursday, November 7, 1918

The top of the ground was a solid mass of human and horse bones.

It is said that more than 700,000 bodies are buried on this hill.

I looked upon the skeletons of many horses and men buried together and had been blown up by the big shells that are still coming over. In so many cases a ring or any metal thing that the man had in his pocket still lay there and by the bones of horses still lay parts of the saddle and the bridle bits between his teeth.

We are getting used to cooties by this time. The only thing I was scared of in the dugout was rats. We had some there as big as common house cats.

On Nov. 8, orders were received to attack early the next morning. They were to take a line from Fresnes-en-Woevre to Parfrondrupt, the infantry in positions from right to left: 324th, 323rd, 322nd and 321st. The attack was to be directed toward the road. This was the first time the 81st Division would go over the top. The 322nd and 324th Infantries would lead the way, with the other two in reserve.

Hewett was wounded Nov. 10, degree undetermined. The wounds were severe enough to be sent home.

In those three days of fighting, 178 were killed, nearly 800 wounded, 57 captured and six missing.

On Dec. 8, 1918, Hewett left Beau Desert, a 550-acre hospital about five miles west of Bordeaux:

Total number of admissions to April 1, 1919: 47,238

Of those, transferred to the United States: 22,880

Returned to duty: 12,699

Died: 304 (Source: The

Medical Department of the United States Army in the World War, Vol. II, Ch. 23)

He boarded in Mallory, destination: Ellis Island. The passenger list included the description that these were "patients needing dressings" which indicated his wounds were not yet healed.

Hewett was honorably discharged Jan. 26, 1919. He had no reported disability.

Willie was married in January 1920. The 1920 Census shows he and his wife were living in Southport, rooming with a John C. Fulbright and his wife. Fulbright was from Louisiana and served at Jackson Barracks, La., during the war, re-enlisting afterward. The census shows Hewett as also continuing to serve with the Army. Willie's military headstone application shows he re-enlisted Oct. 1, 1919, with an honorable discharge Oct. 19, 1920.

Hewett and his wife raised several children in Brunswick County. He passed away May 22, 1962, at 66. He had spent the previous four years in a nursing home. He was laid to rest in Gurganus Cemetery in Shallotte. A military marble headstone was approved and shipped, but it is not shown in findagrave.

Sources: Johnson, Clarence Walton (1919), *The history of the 321st infantry, with a brief historical sketch of the 80th division, being a vivid and authentic account of the life and experiences of American soldiers in France, while they trained, worked, and fought to help win the world war.* Columbia, S.C., The R. L. Bryan Co.; Thomas P. Shinn's *War-time Diary; 81st Division Summary of Operations in the World War*; U.S. Government, 1944



Photos contributed

Beau Desert Hospital and railway facilities

Honoring Brunswick County's World War I veterans

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.

Another roll calling event will be Saturday, April 6, at the rifle range starting at 11 a.m. The yearly fundraiser will be Saturday, May 4.

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 this year 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.