

WWI Profile: William Thompson White 1892-1969

By NORMA ECKARD

Shallotte, Brunswick County, NC
U.S. Army, Corporal
Served: April 15, 1917 – Sept. 2, 1919
Overseas: June 14, 1917 – Aug. 23, 1919

William Thompson White was born and raised in Shallotte, NC. A partial family tree is located in Family Search. On April 6, 1917, the U.S. declared war on Germany. Nine days later, on April 15, 1917, Willie enlisted in the U.S. Army at Fort Thomas, Ky.

Pvt. White became one of many recruits added to the existing 16th Infantry to bring it to war strength, which was quickly chosen by General Pershing to form the 1st Division, America's first division.

The 1st Division, or the "Big Red One," was the first American Army division to arrive in France (June 26, 1917), the first to enter battle (Oct. 23, 1917), the first to report American casualties (Oct. 25, 1917), and the first to lead an American victory (May 28, 1918).

On June 3, Pvt. White presumably joined the division's journey to Hoboken, N.J., to embark for France. As the first troops, they had confidence their participation would be swift and successful, and they would soon return.

On June 14, 1917, they departed in a convoy of 12 ships. A passenger list for the 16th Infantry was not found in order to confirm that Pvt. White sailed with the convoy, but his NC WWI Service Card does confirm these dates.

The 16th Infantry landed at St. Nazaire, France, on June 26, 1917.

Samuel Leob Mintz also traveled with the convoy, serving with Machine Gun Company, 26th Infantry of the 1st Division. Pvt. Mintz had been serving for almost a year, having enlisted on August 15, 1916. He would make the military his career.

The photo of Pvt. White was printed in the Nov. 15, 1917, edition of the Brunswick County News, with the following:

Willie T. White (Somewhere in France)
The above picture of Willie Thompson White, son of Mr. and Mrs. F.M. White of Shallotte, who enlisted in the Army early in the spring, was made in France. He is a member of the 16th Infantry, and was one of the two first boys from Brunswick County to be sent to France; the other is Leob Mintz, son of Mr. S.K. Mintz of Mill Branch.

"Son" makes a good-looking soldier in uniform, but says it is not a good picture – being taken by a Frenchman.

The second battalion of the 16th Infantry (which did not include Pvt. White's Company B) represented America in a parade in Paris on July 4, 1917. The march ended at Lafayette's Tomb, where General Pershing reported for duty by



William Thompson White

declaring, "Lafayette, we are here" in honor of the "friendship and support that France had given to the American colonies in their hour of need when they fought for their liberty."

Two soldiers from Brunswick County – PFC Johnnie Vereen, a member of the Regular Army, and SFC Edward Johnson, a 46-year-old man from Southport (originally from Norway) – joined the division in July when the 5th and 6th Field Artillery of the 1st Division arrived in France. Sgt. Johnson was a bandleader. The bands were fiercely protected from injury, as statements from historical documents like the following show:

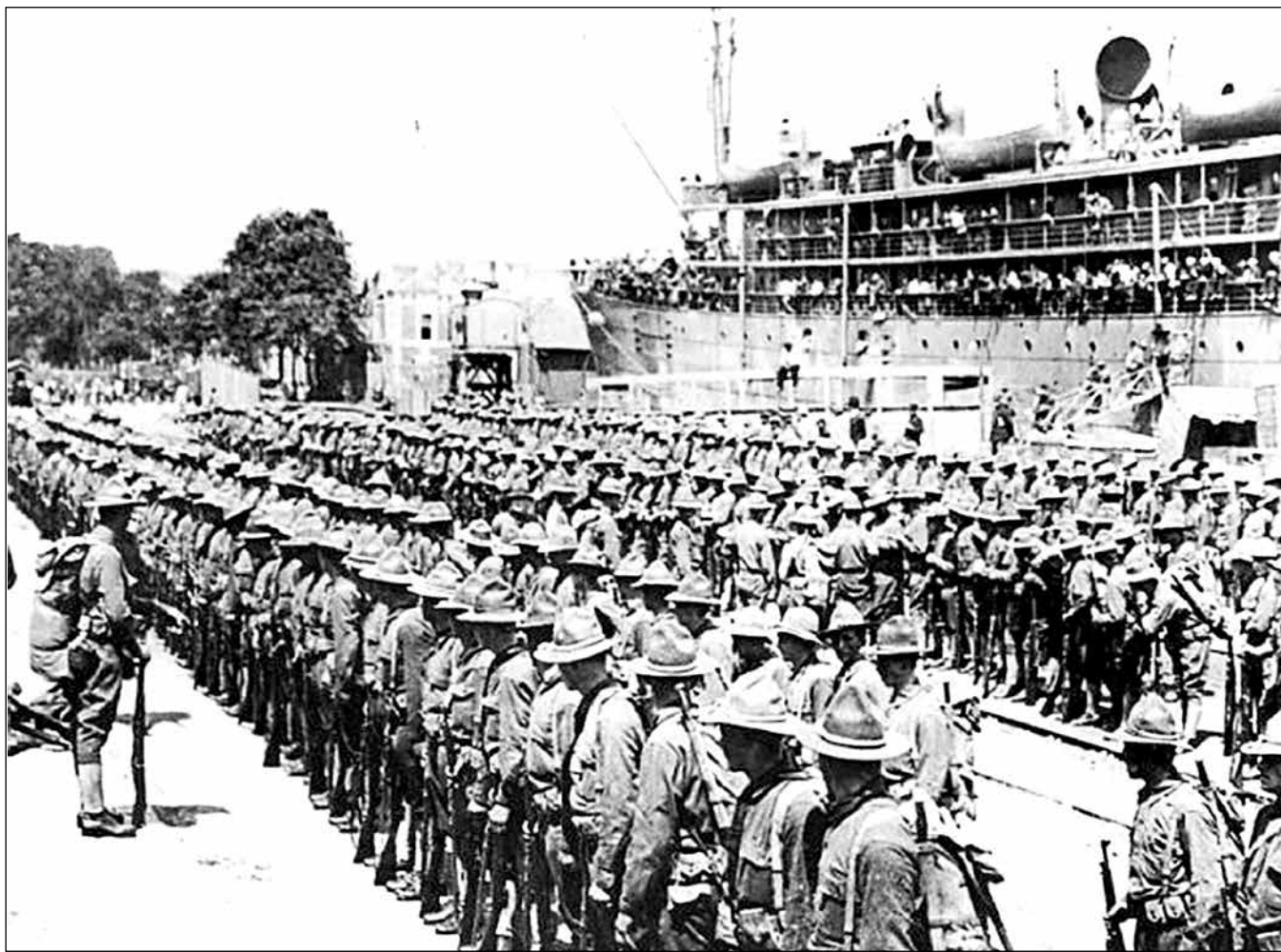
"The band was not permitted to go forward, musicians are too hard to replace, and of too great value in maintaining the morale of the men." ~ Source: Official History of the 120th Infantry.

On April 19, 1918, Pvt. White was assigned to Company B, 1st Supply Train, in which he remained throughout his service.

General Pershing chose the 1st Division for the vital position, or post of honor, in most of his engagements. This, along with the long service time of the division, resulted in a large casualty count of almost 24,000 – 4,964 killed in action, 17,201 wounded in action, and 1,056 missing or died of wounds. None of the men from Brunswick County became casualties.

The division insignia was adopted and first worn after the Armistice. Around this time, Nov. 14, 1918, PFC White was promoted to Corporal. The division then began their work in the Army of Occupation, marching to Germany. Cpl. White would have likely been given three-day passes to explore the countryside during the occupation, as described in the division history.

PFC Leob Mintz transferred to another division after the Armistice. Bandleader SFC



1st Division Infantry arrives in France, June 26, 1917

Photos contributed

Edward Johnson returned home in February 1919, retiring soon after. Cpl Bryant Mintz, a Brunswick County soldier with a NC WWI Service Card showing service in the 1st Division, had no record of overseas travel to/from France and apparently served stateside.

In the middle of June 1919, the Allied negotiations with Germany became unsatisfactory and there were doubts that Germany would sign the Treaty of Versailles. The First Division was put on alert and began preparations to resume hostilities. On June 23, word was received that they would sign; the threat had thankfully passed.

As the division began preparing to return home, several units including Cpl. White's were ordered to remain in Germany. Those willing to stay were quickly transferred in, while those wishing to return home were permitted. Cpl. White did not remain. On Aug. 12, 1919, he began the journey home from France on USS Nansemond, arriving in Hoboken, N.J., on Aug. 23 (Source: Ancestry). He then received his honorable discharge on Sept. 2.

The Aug. 17, 1919, edition of the Wilmington Morning Star (page 8) included this item:

Mr. and Mrs. F.M. White are in receipt of the welcome news that their son, Willie White, is at last sailing for home. Willie was in the first contingent of American troops to go overseas, and apparently with [sic] the last to come back. He is a member of the First Division.

The division marched in NYC on Sept. 10, followed by Washington, D.C., on Sept.

17. William White did not participate. He likely was in poor health as the passenger list referenced above was labeled "First Division Casualty Company."

Cpl. Johnnie Vereen, who served with the 1st Division from the beginning (6th Field Artillery) and Pvt. Alvin Milliken, who joined the 1st Division (7th Field Artillery) in August 1918, likely did march in the parades.

Willie White returned home to Shallotte. According to the 1920 Census, he was working as a blacksmith at a fish factory. He married Julia Hemmingway and raised one son, Kenneth Welch White.

William Thompson White passed away on Oct. 29, 1969. He was laid to rest in Chapel Hill Cemetery in Shallotte, joined a few years later by his wife. A military flat marker is shown.

In 2002, his son passed away. His obituary is shown in the Findagrave link as follows:

Kenneth Welch White Shallotte – Kenneth W. White, 72, of Shallotte Avenue SW, died Thursday, Sept. 12, 2002 at his residence.

Born in Brunswick County on February 20, 1930, he was the son of the late William T. and Julia Hemmingway White. He was predeceased by his wives, Videll White and Marlene White. After his retirement from the N.C. Department of Transportation, he owned and operated K.W. White Trucking Company and delivered the Wilmington Morning Star newspaper for many years.

Surviving are two sons, Kenneth Dale White, Shallotte, N.C. and Steve Allen White and wife, Teresa, Hold-

en Beach, N.C., two daughters Cathy W. Sibbett and husband, Jeff, Ash, N.C. and Julie Anne White, Shallotte, N.C., two step daughters Karen S. Westmoreland and husband, Wade, Swansboro, N.C. and Shawna Stanley, Shallotte, N.C., six grandchildren, Kelly Prestipino, Alex White, Chelsea Sibbett, Kara Westmoreland, Jessica Barnes and Damion Purvis and his closest friend, Harry W. White, and two great-grandchildren.

Funeral services will be conducted Saturday, September 14, 2002, at 1:30 p.m. in the Brunswick Funeral Service Chapel by the Rev. Brent Evans. Burial will be in Chapel Hill Cemetery, Shallotte, N.C.

The family will receive friends from 6:00 p.m. until 8:00 p.m., Friday, September 13, 2002 at the funeral home.

Active casketbearers will be Wayne Smith, David Moore, David Danford, Ricky Danford, Chris Hargis and David Edwards. Honorary Casketbearers will be Harry White, Marvin Watts, Curman Arnold and Roney Cheers.

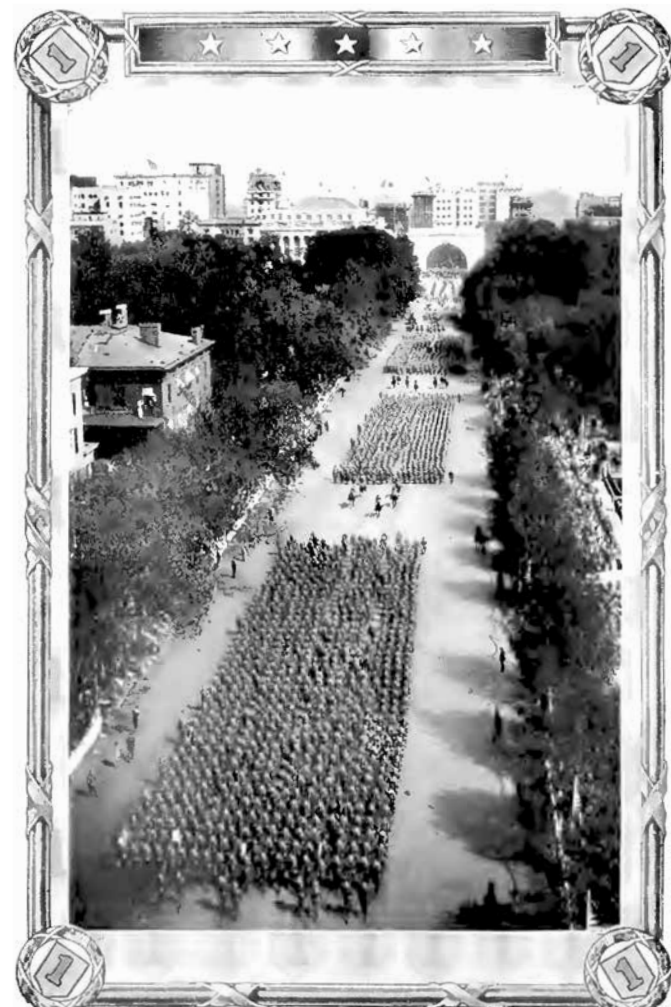
Source: The Society of the First Division (1922) History of the First Division During the World War, 1917-1919.

Philadelphia, The John C. Winston Company.

If you would like to help honor William Thompson White or another Brunswick County WWI veteran, email the Friends of Fort Caswell Rifle Range at ftcaswellriflerange@gmail.com or go to caswellriflerange.com.

A future fundraiser, Oktoberfest, is scheduled for Saturday, Oct. 12, at the Caswell Beach town public service facility building (fire station) to raise funds for publishing the book of Brunswick County men and women that served in WWI; to continue historic preservation of the rifle range memorial; and to honor Brunswick County WWI veterans. There will be authentic German food and a dance with music by The Back Porch Rockers. A Polka Dance Contest and Best Dressed Oktoberfest Outfit will be awarded. More information will follow soon.

Also, another Roll Call is planned for Veterans Day, Monday Nov. 11, at 11 a.m. beside the 1918 Fort Caswell Rifle Range Memorial in Caswell Beach. The public is welcome.



1st Division Infantry in Washington, D.C., for parade on Sept. 17, 1919.



1st Division Artillery in Washington, D.C., for parade on Sept. 17, 1919.