

World War I Profile: Forney Boston Mintz 1892-1960 (Part 2)

BY NORMA ECKARD
GUEST COLUMNIST

*Forney Boston Mintz
Mill Branch, Brunswick
County, N.C.
U.S. Army, Sergeant
Served: Jan. 9, 1918 –
Jan. 8, 1929
Overseas: April 6, 1918 –
April 28, 1919
Wounded: Aug. 15, 1918;
Sept. 27, 1918
Awarded Distinguished
Service Cross, Silver Star
and Purple Heart with Oak
Leaf Cluster.*

This is the second part of the Forney Mintz WWI Profile. Due to the amount of documentation about Forney Mintz, along with his multiple medals and association with a famous event, his WWI Profile has been posted in two parts. Review Part 1 at caswellriflerange.com that includes the story of The Lost Battalion, soldiers from his company and others surrounded by Germans for six days until



Forney Mintz Company B, 29th Infantry.

only 194 of the original 554 soldiers remained.

A story in *The Washington Post* (Oct. 7, 2018). Attacked and starved: A century-old diary recounts U.S. soldiers trapped behind enemy lines. Shared details from the diary of a soldier who survived the Lost Battalion. This particular soldier, Sgt Samuel Marcus, was left sterile due to poison gas exposure. Sgt Marcus was the great-great uncle of the author, who wrote the following after visiting the Meuse-Argonne Cemetery: "The Lost Battalion is one with few descendants: So many young men were killed before having children and many who survived were sterile from gas exposure. Preserving a collective history is a challenge made even more difficult and urgent by the lack of surviving generations. Sam had no children, and to this day, my father and I are the only two people who have read his diary.

I spent hours in the woods and even longer in the cemetery without seeing a single person. Few may be left to visit these graves.

These young men gave their lives and their future – descendants they never had – in a military offensive that reshaped our world, but has nevertheless been largely forgotten. These graves are a testament to the bravery and sacrifice that my uncle's words resurrect."

Sgt Forney Mintz also had no children, whether by choice or the effects of war. These are not isolated cases. Many of the WWI veterans, men and women (recall Southport's Navy Nurse Susie Williams' WWI Profile), on our list of Brunswick County WWI veterans and on the WWI Wall of Honor did not have descendants, while those who did have few still living today.

It is left to us to breathe new life into the memories of these soldiers' lives and sacrifices.

"On Nov. 26, 1921, Lt. Col. Charles Whittlesey, the former commander of The Lost Battalion and the first WWI recipient of the Medal of Honor, after battling inner demons for three years, threw himself over the side of a ship bound for Cuba. His body was never recovered.

In 1919, the events of The Lost Battalion were made into a silent film. Actual maps, documents, and the German note asking for surrender were used. Many of the soldiers, including Lt. Col. Charles Whittlesey, portrayed themselves." In 2001, A&E made a

television movie called "The Lost Battalion" based on accounts of the battle. In that portrayal, Major Whittlesey was played by Ricky Schroder.

Newsletters and newspapers from Fort Benning, Ga., include information about both Forney and his brother Leob, who was also stationed there for some time.

"The Doughboy" yearbooks are also located at this site and while they contain no pictures or information about the Mintz brothers, they do describe the 29th Infantry, in which both served while at Fort Benning. Fort Benning is the home of the U.S. Army Infantry School. Excerpts below are taken from the Fort Benning archives and may be found at benning.army.mil/Library/Virtual.html.

The 29th Infantry:

The 29th Infantry is located at Camp Benning for the principle purpose of furnishing the necessary demonstration troops for the Infantry School. The regiment functions under all of the various departments of the School, as well as the Infantry Board and the Department of Experiment, and is frequently drawn upon for various details necessitated by the present evolutionary stage of the work of the School and Camp.

Some of the junior officers of the regiment are graduates of the Basic course of the Infantry School, but the great majority are veterans of the World War who have recently returned to service.

Jan. 29, 1925: Sgt. Forney B. Mintz and Sgt. Leob Mintz wrote us last week and will be glad to be back with the boys again sometime this month. The two brothers are on a three-month furlough.

Dec. 25, 1925: Sergeants Forney B. Mintz and Leob Mintz left on a 30-day furlough in order to attend the wedding of their sister in Ash, North Carolina

On Sept. 28, 1918, a flank platoon of Company A, 308th Infantry, was facing the Germans near Binarville, France, not far from Verdun. Since the early morning of Sept. 28 this platoon had been slowly advancing against stubborn opposition from enemy machine gun nests. In command was a sergeant of five year's service in the Regulars. The American artillery fire swept forward in front, but Company A had no orders to advance. When the barrage had gone forward more than a mile, the orders to advance arrived. The sergeant led his men forward. How well he performed his duty that day is best indicated by the following citation that accompanied the award to him of the Distinguished Service Cross:

"Forney B. Mintz, Sgt. Company A, 308th Infantry, for extra ordinary heroism in action near Binarville, France, Sept. 28, 1918. Sgt. Mintz, in command of a platoon, worked his way through the enemy rear guard and captured 5 machine guns and an ammunition carrying party. Although badly wounded when an organized position of the enemy was encountered, he made his way back to request reinforcements and brought with him two German prisoners from whom valuable information was obtained."

Even before the war, Sgt. Mintz was no stranger to death and disaster as two years after his original enlistment, Jan. 8, 1913, at Columbus Barracks, he was serving with the 23rd Infantry stationed at Galveston, when the flood struck that Texas port. Mintz, then a private, assisted ably in the rescue work, the burial of the victims, the removal of the debris from the city and the reconstruction of the post.

On Jan. 8, 1916, Mintz was furloughed to the Regular Army Reserve, but when Pancho Villa's raid sent American troops hurrying to the border, he was recalled to the colors and served in

Brownsville, Texas, and Gettysburg, Pa. with the 4th Infantry. During this period he was first made corporal and later sergeant. In June 1917, he was transferred to the 58th Infantry and in August to the 77th Division, with which he went overseas throughout that National Army Division's stay in France.

After being again furloughed to the Reserves in 1919, Sgt. Mintz was discharged Jan. 8, 1920, but the lure of the service was too strong and on Aug. 27, 1920, he came back for another takeout. He served with the 61st Infantry until its demobilization in July 1921, and was then assigned to Company B, 29th Infantry, where he is still serving. In 1925, another discharge was given him. And again he went back to Bluff City, his home in the North Carolina hills, but as on other occasions, back he came for more, signing up again on May 17, 1924.

"Sgt. Mintz is 34 years old, a North Carolinian by birth and inclination and before becoming part of the backbone of Uncle Sam's Army was a tiller of the soil. Calm and collected during the most trying situations, decisive action when once started and withal having a thorough knowledge of his duties, Sgt. Mintz is one of the most efficient non-coms in the crack demonstration regiment. His comrades say he's the kind you'd expect to take a corn cob pipe out of his mouth and spit twice before answering a question. And that's a good kind of man to have around in an emergency."

July 9, 1926: "Sergeant Mintz has made the high score with the rifle, his score being .317. No wonder he likes to shoot the bull in the eye."

Oct. 21, 1927: "The Mintz brothers are back from furlough and reported having a very fine time in N.C., didn't notice any tar on their heels, must have moved pretty fast while there."

The Feb. 8, 1929, issue announced that Sgt. Mintz had been given the honor of serving as an orderly for the Assistant Secretary of War during his visit to Fort Benning.

The 1930 Census shows Sgt. Mintz and his brother Leob still serving with the 29th Infantry at Fort Benning in Chattahoochee, Georgia.

Nov. 14, 1930: "The two Mintz boys are back and their ninety days in Carolina certainly agreed with them, and especially with Sergeant Mintz as he has been unable to find a pair of pants that will fit him, since he came back."

The Jan. 30, 1931 issue mentions the Company Quartet, accompanied by three sergeants playing coronet, saxophone, and Sgt. Mintz on piano. An earlier issue mentions his brother, Leob Mintz, being an artist.

In 1939, the Mintz family's father passed away. His obituary was printed in *The State Port Pilot*.

Ash Merchant Died Last Week

Funeral rites for Samuel K. Mintz, 83, former merchant of the Ash section, who died at his home after a lingering illness, were held at the graveside in the Mintz cemetery near Shallotte on Thursday afternoon. The Rev. R.B. Gerald conducted the services.

He is survived by his wife, Mrs. Ida Mintz; and six children, O.R. Mintz, Newman Mintz, Mina Mintz, and Cora Ludlum, all of Ash; Sergeant F.B. Mintz, of Fort Benning, Ga.; and Leob Mintz, of Washington, D.C.

Mr. Mintz was married four times. His first wife was Miss Mary Bennette, of the Shingletree section, and from this union five children are living. His second wife was Maggie Bennette; his third, Mary Allen, of Tar Hill; and his fourth Ida Goodwin Caines.

In 1940, the Census shows Sgt. Mintz still stationed at Fort Benning.

The Fort Benning Bayonet, July 22, 1943 issue, p. 2 includes the following story about Sgt. Mintz.

Lost Battalion Survivor To Get Discharge Soon; Germans Had Unit Completely Surrounded In Argonne Forest

One of the few survivors of the famous Lost Battalion of World War I, Sgt. Forney B. Mintz of Company C of the Academic Regiment, soon will be discharged from the Army, after more than 29 years service.

The be-ribboned sergeant is the holder of the Distinguished Service Cross, the Purple Heart, the World War ribbon, the Mexican Border ribbons, and the pre-Pearl Harbor ribbon. Two of them were awarded for his heroism with the 1st (Lost) Battalion of the 308th Infantry, 77th Division.

Describing his experience, Sergeant Mintz said, "We were completely surrounded by the Germans in the Argonne. They sent a blindfolded soldier over to ask us to surrender. Our major told them to, 'Go to Hell.' Of course, after that we always called him 'Go to Hell Whittlesey.'"

Tough Spot

"We were in a tough spot," the 51-year-old sergeant recalls. "They shot everything at us. Gas one-pounder machine guns. I didn't have to do any bayoneting, but some of my men did. I had to throw plenty of hand grenades, though."

Stating that they could get supplies only by plane, Sergeant Mintz said they ate nothing but oak leaves and water for days because the Germans would get everything that was dropped for them.

"As soon as we made a move to go for some food or water that had been dropped, they picked us off," the sergeant relates. "Finally, when there were only 20 or



Charles W. Whittlesey, World War I Medal of Honor recipient and former commander of Lost Battalion.

30 of us left, the battalions to the right and left of us advanced, and the Germans fell back. We were saved. And when I got out of there, I went straight to the hospital with two wounds."

Distinguished Service Cross

The day after Christmas, 1918, Maj. Gen. Robert Alexander pinned the D.S.C. on Mintz's chest. Thirteen years later he was awarded the Purple Heart for the same action.

Originally from Ash, Sergeant Mintz signed up for the Army in 1913. He was on reserve during 1916 when he was called back to the colors to serve on outpost duty during the Mexican trouble, thus earning his first ribbon. When war broke out, he was transferred to

Camp Upton as a cadre-sergeant with the 77th Division in the battalion later to be called "Lost Battalion."

Since the first World War, he has been with several units, including the 29th Infantry, and was an acting first sergeant in a CCC unit in Tennessee in 1933. He has been with the Academic Regiment since April 1942.

As with many stories of the war, myths and distortions grow and become accepted facts. Major Whittlesey never uttered the words "Go to Hell," although the message was implied when he ignored the demand to surrender. And the 308th Infantry in its entirety had become "The Lost Battalion."

See **Mintz, 11C**

Mintz

from page 10C

Read more at the WWI Centennial Lost Battalion webpage at worldwar1centennial.org/index.php/finding-the-lost-battalion-myths-and-legends.html.

After his retirement Nov. 30, 1943, The Fort Benning Bayonet, Dec. 2, 1943, issue, p. 12, published the following story about Sgt Mintz.

Mintz has served with various infantry regiments "between the wars," and was an acting top-kick in a CCC unit in Tennessee in 1933. He came to the Academic Regiment in April 1942.

On Dec. 14, 1960, after nearly 4 months at the Fayetteville Veterans Hospital, Forney Boston Mintz passed away from prostate cancer. He had never married. He was laid to rest in Mintz Cemetery in Ocean Isle Beach. A military headstone is shown.



Forney Mintz headstone.

Member given discharge after 30 Years Service

Sgt. Forney B. Mintz, of Ash, N.C., one of the 20 or so heroic survivors of the famed "Lost Battalion," was discharged from the Academic Regiment Tuesday after 30 years with the colors.

Seeing his first active duty during the Mexican border trouble of 1916, Mintz went overseas as a sergeant with the 77th Division. As a result of his service with the almost wiped out "Lost Battalion," he earned the Distinguished Service Cross and the Purple Heart. He was twice wounded during crucial days when the battalion was surrounded, starving and being cut to pieces. When relief came, only a score of Yanks were alive to tell the tale.

Medals received:

DSC: Distinguished Service Cross
 SS: Silver Star
 PH & OLC: Purple Heart with one Oak Leaf Cluster, indicating he was wounded on two separate occasions.

Sources:

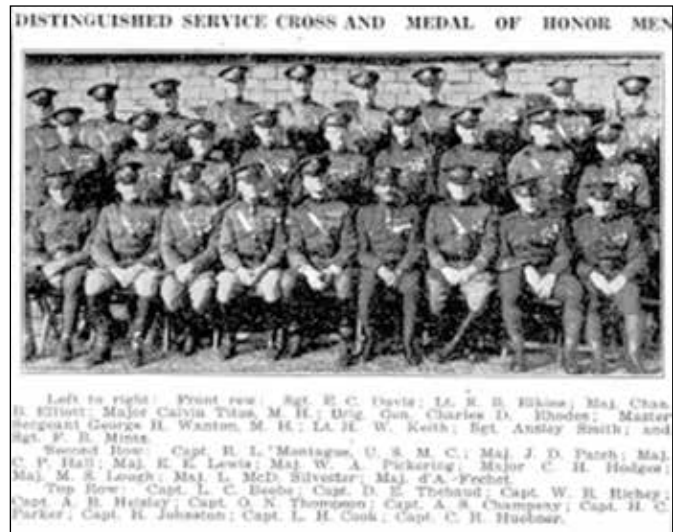
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If you would like to help us honor Forney Boston Mintz or another Brunswick County WWI veteran, email ftcaswellriflerange@gmail.com or go to caswellriflerange.com.

A future fundraiser, Oktoberfest, in Caswell Beach 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 drink as well as a dance with music by The Back Porch Rockers. A Polka Dance Contest and Best Dressed Oktoberfest Outfit will be awarded. The Friends of Ft Caswell Rifle Range are in need of vendors to participate in the Oktoberfest in Caswell Beach event from noon to 3 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 12. More information will follow soon.

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.



Distinguished Service Cross and Medal of Honor Men, Feb. 19, 1926. Sgt Mintz is seated on the far right of the first row.

Photos contributed