

Thor at Fort Caswell Rifle Range by Phil Fravel

On November 11, Thor travelled to the Fort Caswell Rifle Range for the Veterans Day WWI Commemoration Roll Call. At 11:00am, the time the Armistice went into effect 101 years ago, Norma Eckard, president of Friends of Fort Caswell Rifle Range began the program.

This year, the special guests were the family of WWI Brunswick County veteran and only POW, [Pvt Robert Bollie Stanley](#). Two grandchildren of Pvt Stanley (**Fred Stanley** and **Deborah Bolin**) began the continuation of the Roll Call for Brunswick County WWI veterans. Descendants who participated in previous commemorations returned: **Gwen Clemmons Causey** (granddaughter of [Sgt Henry Lindon Clemmons](#)) and **David Lewis** (grandson of [Lt David Elton Lewis](#)).



Photo Credit: Phyllis Wilson

Thor was fired at the end of each Roll Call reading to honor the WWI veterans.

The next scheduled reading is April 04, 2020 at 11:00am. Descendants add meaning to the ceremonies and are considered special guests. All of the work done by Friends of Ft. Caswell Rifle Range is dedicated to the families of the veterans and they are welcome to attend or call names for the Roll Call.



A word about Friends of Fort Caswell Rifle Range by President Norma Lee Eckard:

My husband Ron Eckard and I have been working on the 1918 Fort Caswell Rifle Range since 2011. The rifle range is located across the street from where we live in Caswell Beach and was once the property of Fort Caswell. In fact, most of Oak Island was the property of the military.

The range is about 200 feet long and it needs repairs to the two lintels and a passageway wall. While we researched who built this piece of history, we established that it was built by Fort Caswell to train soldiers for World War I. The rifle range was added to the proposal of MdM of Durham and in December 2013 it was entered on the National Register of Historic Places. In March 2015, Friends of Fort Caswell Rifle Range became a 501(C)(3).

In order to inspire people to support the responsibility and care of the range we asked the public to send us photographs and stories about family members who served in WWI. We then created a WWI Wall of Honor. This is shown on the website.

As time grew closer to the WWI Centennial Commemoration, we knew that research was needed to identify Brunswick County men and women who served in the war. Our daughter, Amy, already had our website up and running so she dedicated the month of October 2017 to the research of military records to accumulate a list of Brunswick County military. Our current total is 717 men and one female nurse from Southport who served in WWI from our county.

We're excited to announce that an historical book is in the works. Our non-profit wanted the book completed in November 2018. Now we plan to publish within the year 2020. We are applying to foundations for support to publish. If possible the books will be placed in our libraries, high schools, middle schools, early college and Brunswick Community College as reference material for students and the public.

Our planned title is "BRUNSWICK COUNTY IN THE GREAT WAR: Preserving the Fort Caswell Rifle Range and the Legacies of the Men and Women Who Served."

Editor's Note: The article below is reprinted with permission from the Friends of the Fort Caswell Rifle Range website. It was researched and written by Amy Eckerd. Visit the site to read lots more about the Rifle Range and stories of the Brunswick County men and women who served in World War One and to learn how you can help honor Brunswick County WW1 vets.



WWI Profile: William James Gordon 1891-1930

[William James Gordon](#)

Southport, Brunswick County, NC

US Army

Private, First Class

Served:

March 29, 1918 – April 9, 1919

Overseas:

June 10, 1918 – February 11, 1919

Wounded: November 4, 1918

Gunshot wound

Photo source: 92ndinfantry.org.

William James Gordon was born May 29, 1891, in Southport, Brunswick County, NC, the son of Franklin H. Gordon (1855-1939), a public-school teacher (**and first black educator in Brunswick County**), and Nannie Gordon (1860-1943). His father is [buried in](#) John N. Smith Cemetery in Southport. His father's headstone shows William had two siblings, Cenelius and Frank. The locations of his mother's and brothers' gravesites are unknown.

William [was married](#) on June 4, 1912, in Southport to Evelyn Frink ([1891-1957](#)). His 1917 [WWI Draft Registration](#) shows he was married with a 4 year old son. He is listed as a laborer working in Philadelphia. [His son](#), William James Gordon, Jr. (1913-2004) had a [very distinguished career in education](#) like his grandfather, [served his country](#) like his father, and [is buried](#) in Lebanon National Cemetery in Kentucky.

William was honored with a position in the 365th Infantry, 92nd Division, along with [William Frederick Brooks](#), who sadly had died of meningitis days after the infantry left for France, and [Robert Bollie Stanley](#), all from Brunswick County.



Before leaving for France, the 92nd Division chose their insignia and nickname. The 92nd was nicknamed the "[Buffalo Soldiers](#)" in honor of African American troops who served in the American West after the Civil War. The patch is shown above.

Company H of the 365th Infantry, which included Pvt Gordon and Pvt Stanley, embarked at Hoboken, NJ, on June 10, 1918, and reached Brest, France, on the 19th day of June 1918. The camp was established at Bourbonne-les-Bains, a small resort area in the northeast of France, about 60 miles from the front. They immediately began an [eight week period of intensive training](#) in offensive and defensive tactics.

On July 6, 1918 **Pvt. Gordon was promoted** to Private First Class.

The soldiers of the 92nd and the 93rd infantry divisions were the first Americans to [fight in France](#).

The [John N Smith cemetery](#) in Southport was named by the Wilmington Foundation as [the most threatened site in the Cape Fear region](#) for 2017. The 1918 Fort Caswell Rifle Range is on this list as well. The Friends of the Fort Caswell Rifle Range and the Southport Historical Society support the recovery and restoration of this important cemetery.

In August, they took up positions in the St. Die sector, where they received their first contact with the enemy. They fought with honor [through many engagements](#) on the Meuse-Argonne front and [won numerous awards from the French](#).



Ssource: net.lib.byu.edu/estu/wwi/comment/scott/Stno6.htm

October 29, 1918: Pvt Robert Bollie Stanley (Pfc Gordon's fellow soldier from Brunswick County) was reported missing.

November 4, 1918: Pfc Gordon was wounded.

November 11, 1918: The armistice between the Allies and Germany was signed.



Photo source: [92nd Division WWI History](#).

This map shows the approximate location of the front lines in western Europe when the 92nd Division was deployed.

[In the 365th's final battle](#), there were 43 Killed in Action or Died of Wounds, 583 Wounded, and 32 Missing, most of whom were killed or succumbed to wounds. Of the three initial Brunswick County soldiers in the infantry, [Pvt William Frederick Brooks](#) died of disease before leaving the United States, [Pfc William James Gordon](#) was wounded, and [Pvt Robert Bollie Stanley](#) was missing.

On February 25, 1919, Pfc Gordon boarded the U.S.S. *Nansemond* with other sick and wounded soldiers. He was discharged from the Army on April 9, 1919.

William passed away in 1930 from heart disease [source: [ancestry.com](#)]. His death certificate lists a contributory cause to his death as "paralysis left side due to bullet wounds received in world war."

He was [laid to rest](#) in Smith Cemetery with his father. A military headstone [was requested](#) in 1937 and remains there today.



In the years following the war, the 92nd Division gained fame as records of their accomplishments slowly became known. The November 7, 1942 edition of *Baltimore Afro-American*, p 20, published this account from General John J. Pershing:

The 92nd Division has been, without a doubt, a great success. And I desire to commend both the officers and the men for the high state of discipline and the excellent morale which has existed in this command during its entire stay in France.

The 92nd Division continued their gallantry in World War II, after which segregation in the military was ended.

Most of the information gathered was from E.J. Scott, author of [The American Negro in the World War](#), Chapter XI, which quoted the work of T.T. Thompson, *Historian of the Famous 92nd Division*. Another excellent reference is the website <http://92ndinfantry.org/>