

Wallowa History Center

Preserving Our Past for the Future

Newsletter Number 26 • Summer 2016

The Wallowa History Center works to save the memories, stories, and photographs that define the history and culture of the places we call home.

Our Men & Women of World War I



Wallowa High School Class of 1917

Row 1,L-R Ray Hendricks, Sheeny Alford, Orell Poole, Harry Coleman, Melvin Bue

Row 2 Lena Marvin, Ada Bell, Ross Hood, Mabel Keeler, Don McDaniel, Eva Greer

Row 3 Ruby Ballard, Virgil Coverstone, Earl Pfeffer, Florence Coleman, Sylvia Applegate, Ida Powers, Olive Goff, Bruce Brace, Margaret Forstad, James Plass, Lola Greer, Heber Greer

World War I known as the First World War and sometime the Great War started in Europe in 1914 and ended November 11, 1918. The Selective Service Act was enacted May 18, 1917. The major difference in the new draft law was that a substitute could not be hired to fight in a man's place as had been allowed in the Civil War Draft.

Involvement of the United States started just as the Wallowa High School Class of 1917 was preparing for graduation. In an earlier newsletter we covered the information about the Hospital Corp, which was formed and trained by Dr. Verdo Gregory. The Class of 1917 had 26 students but there were only 12 students on the stage, all being young ladies for the graduation ceremonies. The boys having volunteered in the Hospital Corp and were all at Ft Warren, in Washington State. Three of the boys had been sent to other stations. Virgil Coverstone and Bruce Brace were at Vancouver, Washington and Orell Poole was at a Wireless station in Kansas.

The Wallowa Sun Newspaper was sent to soldiers and they responded to family and friends with information about their experiences in military life.

Following are excerpts from letters, which were sent to the Wallowa Sun Newspaper or family members.

A Few Lines from "The Bunch" July 26, 1917

The Soldier Boys Appreciate the Eats sent to them by Wallowa Friends

To our kind friends at home:

We hereby wish to express our appreciation and thank the people at home for the "eats" which are gone but not forgotten.

All of us are well and making it fine and with the exception of a few cases measles, no one has been indisposed.

It isn't bad at all to be in the army if you are from a town like Wallowa.

On July 14, H. Soden asked for volunteers to help carry the boxes for the Wallowa Boys from headquarters. There were plenty of volunteers too. We got them down to our barracks at noon. We did not attend mess but took for the tall timber, each boy with a box under his arm. Of course you can guess the rest. It is no wonder that Richards is so fat: Hammack would have done fine if he hadn't got a piece of pie on the back of his neck; French nearly ate all the "olives"; Sheeny said he had never been "Fuller"; Soden said it was "Good-nough?" Couch blushed as usual when someone said "Make out your dinner, Ralf; Fuzz McDaniels was so full he couldn't hardly get "Overland"; Thompson and Bue would be eating yet if the contents had held out; K Hall had the misfortune of being sick and couldn't partake but he probably would have been sick anyway; Greer had just been turned out of the hospital on account of the measles and it sure is a wonder that he didn't have to go back.

Of course we invited E. Bloom of Lostine and the Joseph boys to our feed. In athletics, we could always beat them but not so sure when it comes to eating.

It is the 18th and we are all still well and happy, just because we are from Wallowa where lives the best people on earth.

Resolved: We will always remember that they never forgot us.

THE BUNCH at Fort Lawton

September 27, 1927

Western Union Telegram to the Wallowa Sun

Wallowa Boys Land Somewhere in France

Our boys have the distinction of being the first Oregon Unit on Foreign

Soil. Received at 10:30 AM

Wallowa Bunch Arrived safe... "The Bunch" Couch

Members of this group were, Ralph Couch, Eugene Alford, and Ray Hendricks. Charles Richards, Harold Soden, Lawrence Southwick, Wallowa and Melvin Bloom, Lostine. This was the group trained by Dr. Verdo Gregory

Camp Kearney, California December 19, 1917

Mr. Bledsoe, Wallowa, Oregon

Dear Sir: In behalf of "The Bunch" I am going to write and thank you for sending the Wallowa Suns to us. Although we have neglected to thank you before, I can assure you we are always glad to get the paper from "Our own home town."

We would all like to come home and spend Christmas but there is no chance, as only three and four days leave will be given. It is very hot and dusty here and I suppose it won't seem like Christmas to us Wallowaites.

Merry Christmas to you and every one in "Old Wallowa"

From "The Bunch" H.C Greer

A Letter from the Front

Somewhere in France September 27, 1917

(The blank spaces are where the censor cut out words)

My dear Folks,

As time is limited and there's not much news, I will write to you all at once. I've just finished chow so you know the-----in. Just before chow we went on about a five-mile hike thru the town. We are about a half hour's hike from the town in a_____ rest camp where_____ soldiers who are wounded and disabled come from the front to rest up. Did you get my card I wrote from_____? I just had time to write two cards while we were there for we boarded a train right away. We travelled about ten hours and arrived in an_____port about 11 o' clock. We marched about three miles to an English rest camp and turned in about two o'clock. We left there the next night and embarked for_____. We expect to move nearer the front at anytime now. There are quite a number of German prisoners here. The voyage across "the frog pond" didn't hurt none of us much only Tubby, who was sick most of the way across. How's school by this time? Well I can't think of any more things to say only for you to write often.

Eugene E Alford, American Expeditionary Force in France, Med Dept.

Camp Kearny Linda Vista, California

C.T. McDaniel October 26, 1917

We have something like 250 patients in the hospital now; with only one kitchen you can see we are kept pretty busy.

I guess I won't send any more money home as I have bought two Liberty Bonds which I consider a pretty good way to save money

Donald McDaniel

Wallowa Sun May 2, 1918

A crowd of at least 200 people gathered at the depot yesterday afternoon to meet the outgoing train to bid goodbye to the soldier boys who were leaving for American Lake. The six boys leaving were W.C. Werst and Floyd Hilton of Wallowa, Harry Savage, Troy, Louis Mosier of Minam, Theodore Bright, Lostine and Charles Dunbar, Enterprise.

July 25, 1918

From Camp Lewis

With the Colors,

Dear Friends; Just a few lines to let you know I am fine and enjoying army life. The boys are so good to take care for that you could not help doing all in your power to do for them.

Am stationed at Camp Lewis, Expect to be here for some time; maybe as long as six months.

My address is Anna Hagen, A.N. C. Base Hospital, and Camp Lewis, Wash.

(Anna Hagen Hook was a member of the American Legion Kruse Post and a member of the rifle team)

Dear ones at home November 27, 1917

...I have lots to tell you. The Lieutenant who was in charge of flying called me over just as I got to school and told me to go into the dark room and load up a couple of magazines as I was going right up. I put on my flying togs. I broke all records in loading and came out and was given a map with the section marked on it that I was to get (photograph). I got into the machine (a Curtiss biplane) and fastened the camera while he was tuning up the motor. A fellow named Wright was my pilot.

When we got to 1000 feet I was feeling fine. I used my hand as a windshield. We got up to 4,000 feet and headed into the wind. We got up to 6,000 feet and then up to 7,000 and flew over Old Point, Hampton and New Port News and I snapped my territory. We were up for an hour and a half and I could sit here all night and write about it.

Lovingly, Orell Poole

(Orell Poole died from injuries in the war and is buried in the Wallowa Cemetery)

November 5, 1918

American Expeditionary Forces in France

... It has rained just about every day and was not very pleasant to work in...This is in time of war we will do any thing to get this thing over so that we can get back home again

...I wish I had some pictures that I could send you, as those you sent me were fine. France is a mighty nice place when a man is here for just a month or so...but when you have been here as long as we have been here you cannot say that you like the place.

Dale Knott, Co. P 35th Reg

Jan 19, 1919 From the Front

France Dec 4, 1918

... You ask why we boys never said anything about any of the battles we were in. Well, I guess it was because we tried to forget them as soon as we could. Every time some of our boys were killed it was almost like your own brother, so we tried to put it out of our minds as soon as possible.

Your son, Charles F Southwick

April 3, 1919

Dear Mother, Father and All,

I wonder how everything is at home tonight. I suppose the snow is all gone and all the kids are going on "Tick Hill", to find the first buttercups and Oh how I wish I were there to go again...

...You always want me to tell you something about life on the front so I will tell you of the campaign front. When we came off the St Miehl front we went to rest camp for ten days. Then one morning we got up at three o'clock and harnessed up our horses and hiked about 15 k before breakfast. After breakfast we loaded on a train and travelled all day and that night we got to a little station where we unloaded about 200 horses, our guns, caissons, and wagons. You can hardly imagine what a job it is to do all this without lights.....and off in the distance the flash of guns and the low continuous roar of the artillery and everyone dog tired. We hiked most of that night and everytime we would stop for a rest the fellows would flop down on the wet ground and go to sleep if only for ten minutes.

Cpl. Fred L Southwick, 2nd Division 17th Field Artillery. Battery B

Ehrenbreitsien, Fortress, Germany

This is a lengthy letter and can be read in full at the Wallowa History Center.