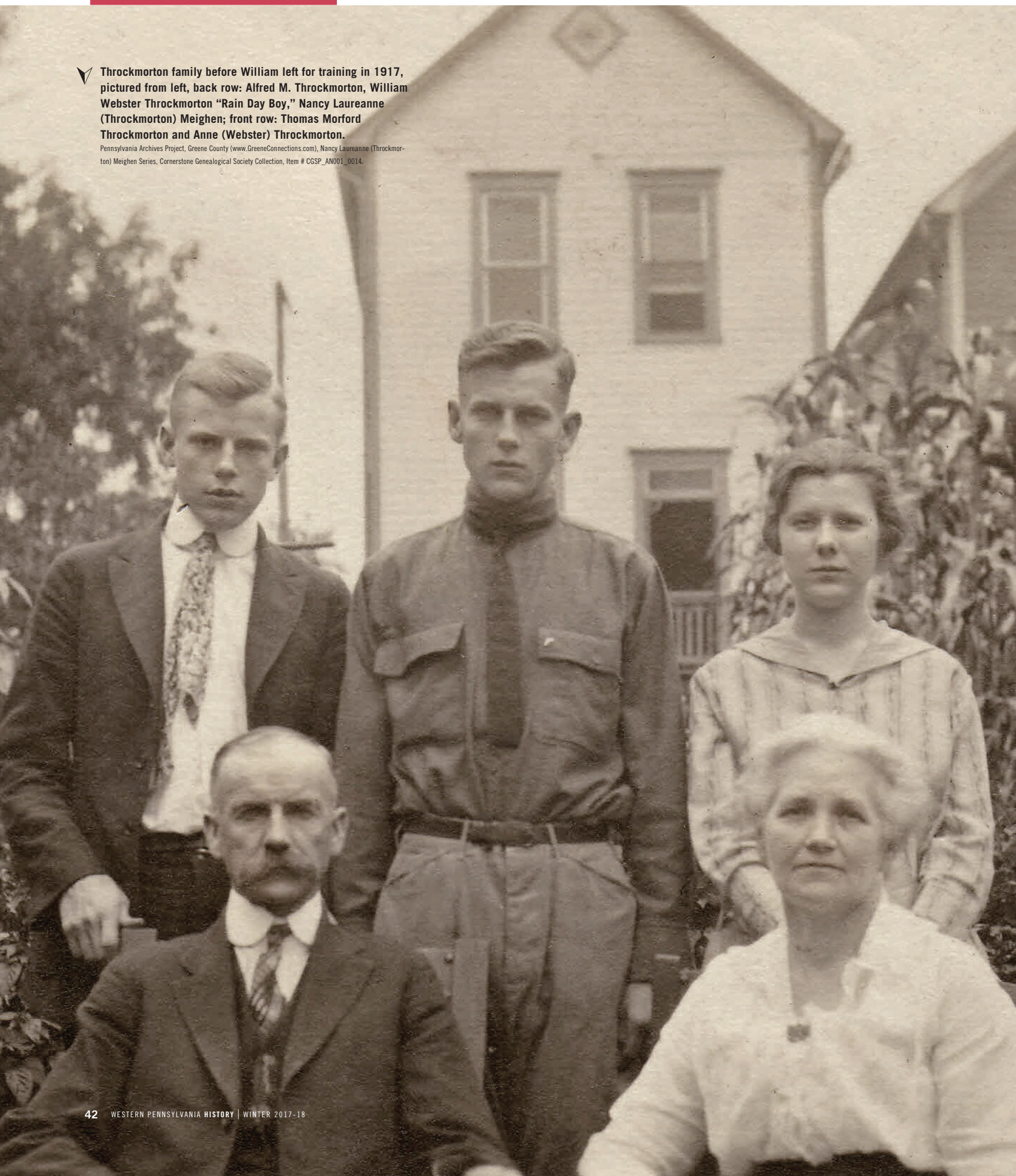


✓ Throckmorton family before William left for training in 1917, pictured from left, back row: Alfred M. Throckmorton, William Webster Throckmorton "Rain Day Boy," Nancy Laureanne (Throckmorton) Meighen; front row: Thomas Morford Throckmorton and Anne (Webster) Throckmorton.

Pennsylvania Archives Project, Greene County (www.GreeneConnections.com), Nancy Laureanne (Throckmorton) Meighen Series, Cornerstone Genealogical Society Collection, Item # CGSP_AN001_0014.



The Rain Day Boys

THE GREENE THAT LAY NEAR GRIMPETTES WOODS

By Candice L. Buchanan and Glenn J.R.T. Toothman, III

Funeral card of Albert "Bert" Buchanan, Rain Day Boy killed in action July 29, 1918.

Pennsylvania Archives Project, Greene County (www.GreeneConnections.com),
Loretta Rozenie (Ullom) Auten Collection, Item # AUTL_AN001_0004.



On July 29, 1918, rain fell in Greene County, Pennsylvania ... just like it had done every year since 1874, when they started keeping records. "Rain Day" would later grow into a local holiday but at first it was a simple observance, started when a farmer mentioned to his pharmacist that it always rained on his birthday. Halfway around the world, Greene County boys crawling up a muddy hill in France also felt rain while German machine gun fire

poured down onto the open slope that the men were trying to climb. In just that one day, a rural Pennsylvania community went from 0 to 18 men lost. No amount of bright blue sky in nearly 100 years could take the rain from this single day.

The men killed in action on Hill 212 were given quick, informal battlefield burials. Greene County native Floyd Patterson had the sad duty of burying the dead; he wrote, "Those

who were killed in battle were wrapped in their blankets and temporarily buried, then after the battle was over their bodies were taken up, each one placed in a box and reburied, the graves being carefully marked."¹

Families in the United States were anxious to bring loved ones home to rest but while war raged, personnel, time, and transport could not be tied up. After the fighting ended, military families were given a choice: soldiers could

either be returned home for burial, or they could be buried in one of the new American military cemeteries abroad. Between 1921 and 1923, all but two of the “Rain Day Boys” were repatriated home by their families for burial.

Our research into Greene County’s Rain Day Boys began in 2001 as a simple look into the lives of nearly forgotten ancestors. Our goal was merely trying to reassemble and revive their stories. We would pay our respects many times over to the 16 buried in and around Greene County. However, there were a couple obvious voids in that tour, so we waited and planned for the day when we could visit the two soldiers who did not return from France.

Waynesburg

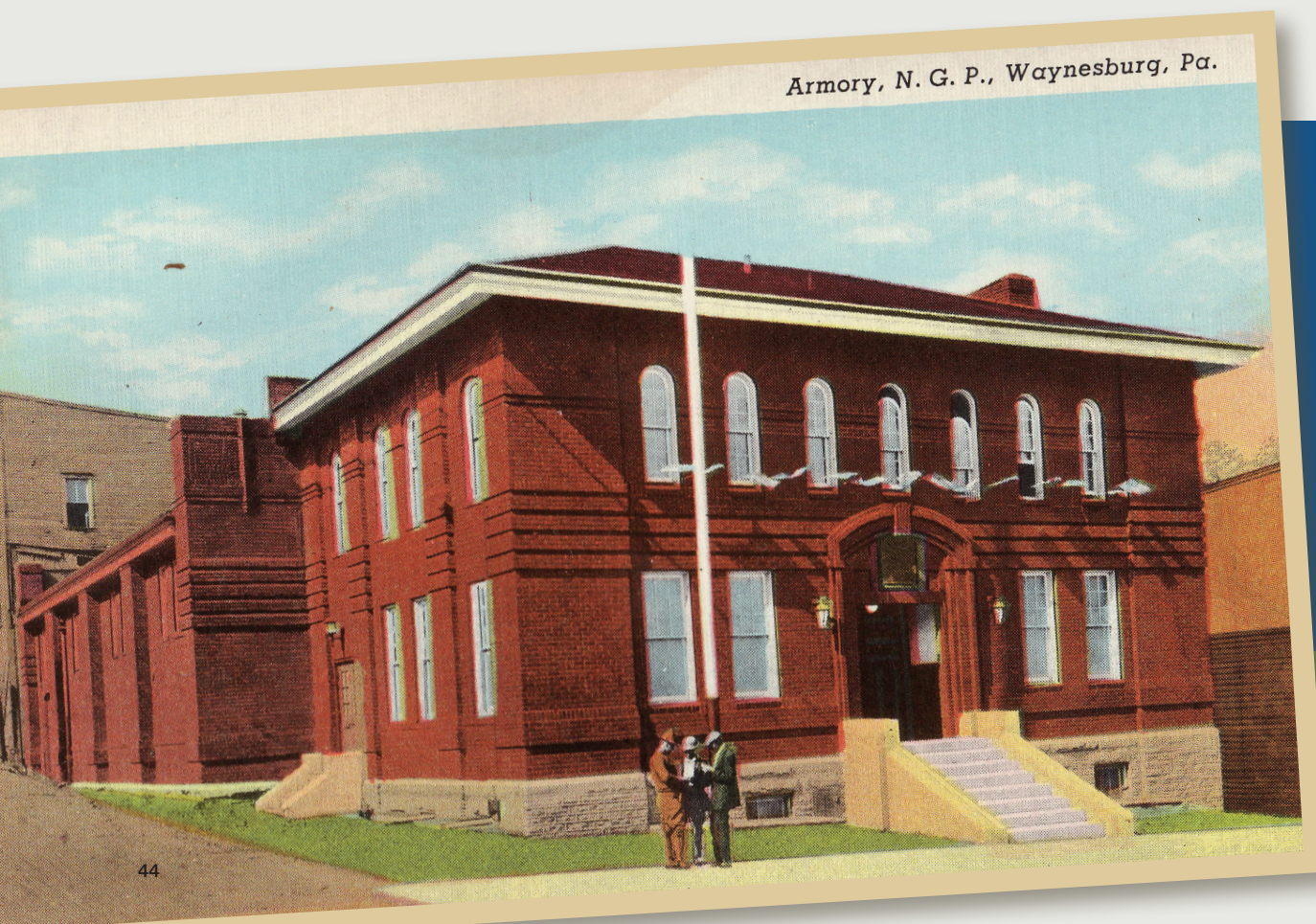
When Rain Day came in 1918, not even a year had passed since the Company K, 110th Infantry (10th PA), 28th Division left the

Armory in Waynesburg and marched south on Washington Street to board the Waynesburg & Washington Railroad. That would be the first leg of their journey to training at Camp Hancock, Georgia. Civil War veterans led the 150 war-bound young men in this parade through town on September 7, 1917, parting once they reached the packed railway station to let the young pass between the old as a reverent sendoff.² The unfortunate reality of such a warm and ceremonious farewell was that in too few months, shock and grief shook the community. In mid-August 1918, devastating telegram after telegram arrived from the War Department, breaking the hearts of Greene County.³ The 18 names memorialized via these first notices would swell to 58 before the war ended, but not ever would such a deluge come at once as in the initial revelation of these first heavy losses.⁴

The uncensored nature of news reporting

during World War I, particularly in small town publications, reveals both the intense mourning of a bereaved community paying tribute to a sudden, huge loss of life, and an unabated need to know exactly what had taken place. As researchers, as members of this community, and as individuals closely related to not just one, but between us, to four of those killed on July 29, we shared these sentiments, anxious to learn more about both the men and the circumstances.

All 18 who perished—one on July 28 and 17 on July 29—were young, unmarried men without descendants who gave their lives in an oft-overlooked war. Even before the last survivors of Company K had passed away, merry Rain Day celebrations—focused on tracking the possibility of rain—had captured local affection for July 29. To the credit of the annual organizers for this local holiday event, a moment’s silence continues to be set aside for



◀ Linen postcard of the Armory on Washington Street in Waynesburg, Greene County, as it looked during WWI.

Pennsylvania Archives Project, Greene County (www.GreeneConnections.com), Walter “Blackie” Markiewicz Postcard Collection, owned and shared by Brice and Linda Rush, Item # RUSH-AN001-0013-0026.

these soldiers every year during the otherwise lively celebrations in downtown Waynesburg.

We reassembled the 18 lives with every photo, article, map, interview, and detail we could muster. Sixteen years of research later, and a century, almost to the day, that the Armory doors opened for that grand march to ultimate combat, we prepared to follow these brave, young men to a hallowed hill in France. We started our own journey by walking, albeit much less ceremoniously, from the still-standing Armory, down Washington Street, to the site of the old railway station.

Fresnes-en-Tardenois and Cierges

Almost any person with Greene County ties will have some connection to at least one of the 18 boys lost between July 28-29, 1918. Many more connect to the number of local soldiers who fought on that hill and survived the day, but were never the same because of it. Armed with our research and our outstanding friend Murielle Le Du to translate for us, we began to seek the rest of our boys' story.

Fresnes-en-Tardenois was where the headquarters of the 28th Division was struck on July 28. In the blast, Greene County lost its first soldier, James Leo Farrell. He and his comrades were buried in temporary graves in the town.⁵ The location was also very near, of course, to the erupting battlefields where the allied troops suffered heavy casualties between July 25–August 3.

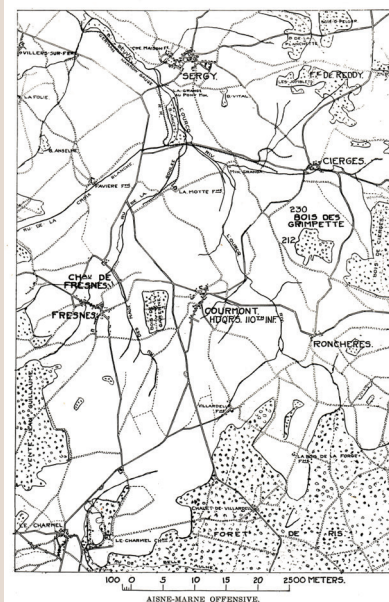
From the little village of Fresnes-en-Tardenois, one fellow we met, Joel Pauws, absolutely made our whole trip. After reviewing a copy of a military map from 1918 that we provided, he volunteered his afternoon to lead us to the actual location of the battle and the related landmarks we had identified.

The small village of Cierges is the French town closest to what our U.S. military



◀ This church is at the heart of the small village of Fresnes-en-Tardenois, where James Leo Farrell was killed when 28th Division Headquarters were shelled here on July 28. He and his comrades were laid to rest in temporary graves in the village until after the war.
Collection of the authors, 2017.

christened as Hill 212. This was the fateful hill of July 29. Clearly identified in the history of the battle, Cierges is also mentioned in a small plaque on the Greene County Courthouse back home in Waynesburg: "In Memory of the Members of Company K, 110th Infantry Who Fought and Those Who Died in Taking of Ciergues Hill in Grimpettes Woods on July 28, 29, 30, 1918." In visiting this French town, a mystique was lifted and a kinship was felt.



▶ This map was our guide to the physical locations of July 28-30, 1918. It shows Fresnes (Fresnes-en-Tardenois), L'Ourcq (the Ourcq River), and Hill 212 beside the "Bois des Grimpette" (Grimpettes Woods).
Association of the 110th Infantry, History of the 110th Infantry (10th Pa.) of the 28th Division, U.S.A., 1917-1919 (Greensburg: Association of the 110th Infantry, 1920), 60.



▲ Honoring James Leo Farrell, first soldier from Greene County, Pennsylvania, to lose his life in WWI.

Collection of the authors, 2017.

Hill 212 near Grimpettes Woods

We had no idea if we would reach the exact spot where the Rain Day Boys fought and fell. We knew it was not a preserved park, but land likely to be in use. Anything may have been built, fenced, or blocked. Under Joel's guidance, we were deep into a rural area of active farmland and small country roads winding through tiny villages. Even if the land was accessible, we had only the hope of local help to find such a specific place.

Our volunteer chaperone determined the potential location from our research maps. He had never stopped there, but having driven by this location often, he remembered seeing something in the vicinity that gave him an idea about a possible point of interest. This ended in being the precise location where the Rain Day Boys had fallen on July 29, 1918.

Words are insufficient. The land was active farming country, but open. Though wheat was not waving in the field at the foot of the hill, in nature it was remarkably unchanged from descriptions we had read so many times in accounts of the battle. A modern monument bearing an inscribed message had been placed beside an older artistic tribute—both signified hard-won liberation. The inscription, written only in French, is testament to the expected audience, as well as, the appreciation and long-memory of the local population significantly affected by the soldiers' sacrifices. For us, the monument also confirmed that this was the place we had so hoped to find. Translated, it reads:

Here all the Allied troops rejoined after the crossing of the Ourcq.

Any subsequent progression depended on the catching of Grimpettes Woods.

On July 28, 1918, Roncheres was released by the 3rd Division U.S. and Courmont by the 28th Division U.S. Between 31 July and 1 August 1918, the 32nd Division U.S. and the French Army DeGoutte liberated Caranda and Cierges.

We walked the ridge of Hill 212 to Grimpettes Woods, each of us with a close family member who shared the relationship to one or more of the soldiers who fell here—Glenn with his wife Dianne Closser Toothman, and Candice with her mother Donna Leasure Buchanan—as well as Murielle and Joel.

Accounts of the battle indicate that the Allied forces came across the Ourcq

River, through the open fields, and up Hill 212 toward Grimpettes Woods. Here, the Germans were entrenched. Small artillery and machine guns were dug in and hidden by thick cover. The Allies had a 700-yard charge up the slight slope to the woods. German strategy allowed our boys to advance nearly 500-yards before they commenced a full shower of lead. Machine guns mowed down advancing troops and artillery targeted the back lines of Allied positions, to cut off any effective retreat or reinforcements. Here our boys were caught in a couple hundred yards of hell.

Lieutenant Fred Cleavenger, who survived the battle, but was injured on July



▲ The small village of Cierges is associated with Hill 212 and is mentioned on the WWI memorial that hangs on the front of the Greene County Courthouse in Waynesburg.

Collection of the authors, 2017.



The Ourcq River, a tributary to the Marne, is frequently identified as a landmark in the geography and maps we studied. Even though the 1918 descriptions do indicate its minimal size, when one reads of crossing a river, a certain visual still comes to mind.

Collection of the authors, 2017.

In five minutes



the earth was heaped with
dead and dying, and what was
left of us were lying there
firing at the hidden machine
gun nests and awaiting what
seemed certain death.



➤ Honoring the fallen soldiers from Greene County and so many others, at the American Monument in Chateau Thierry, France. We are holding photos of our relatives who are honored here; all four soldiers were Rain Day Boys killed or mortally wounded in battle on July 29, 1918. Pictured, from left: Dianne Closser Toothman with Hallie Closser; Glenn Toothman with William Webster Throckmorton; Candice Buchanan with Bert Buchanan; Donna Darlene Leasure Buchanan with Lawrence Leslie Staggers.

Collection of the authors, 2017.

30 as it continued, inadvertently supplied eager readers back home with a long-sought-after account of the combat when his friend published a letter he had written:

It was July 28th when we first went “over the top” as a united battalion, with Companies I and K in the lead. I went over with a patrol first and we ran into severe machine gun fire and had to “dig in.” Then we were recalled and started a general attack. We pushed forward steadily the 28th and crossed the Ourcq River and our company lost one killed and a few wounded. At early morn on the 29th we started our next attack up

the hill northeast of the Ourcq. The top of this hill is wooded and was full of Boches and machine gun nests, trench mortars, 77s, etc. Our advance was up a gentle slope some quarter of a mile long and absolutely no protection.... Shrapnel, high explosives and all sorts of “pig iron,” gas shells, etc., were flying around us and occasionally found its mark, but we advanced within 200 yards of the wooded crest before anything else opened up on us. Then perdition let loose and the scene is indescribable. In five minutes the earth was heaped with dead and dying, and what was left of us were lying there firing at the hid-

den machine gun nests and awaiting what seemed certain death. I shall never forget my feelings during the next two hours. German snipers in the trees taking pot-shots, machine gun bullets buzzing around me like a swarm of bees, and shells bursting in front, in the rear and on either side of me with a crashing sound that made it seem as though brain and skull would be torn apart. Three men on my left, Zahniser, Closser and Murphy, all Greene countians, were killed as we lay there and several on my right. Once in awhile between shell-bursts, the cries of the wounded could be heard (the most terrible part



➤ Visiting George T. McNeely, Rain Day Boy killed in action, July 29, 1918. His body was never recovered and he is listed on the Tablets of the Missing at Aisne-Marne American Cemetery.

Collection of the authors, 2017.

of the battle) then one almost welcomed the cannon's roar again. At last, after the slaughter had become terrible, we were ordered to fall back, but it seemed impossible to ever do so in the face of that terrible fire. I watched men start to run, but they never made very many steps until a bullet caught them.... When I reached the old position at the Ourcq River I found some 70 men out of our company of 240 who had started up the Sergy Hill.⁶

Artillery support was lacking and delayed orders prevented the infantry advance from moving in unison to form a line.⁷ Six separate

attacks over three days, July 28–30, were required to take the hill. Major Edward Martin reported the 110th Infantry suffered more than 1,100 casualties;⁸ Cleavenger reported Company K had lost 45 and over 100 wounded.⁹

In Varennes, France, a monument honoring Pennsylvania's WWI soldiers bears the message, "Right is More Precious Than Peace." This seems a simple and accurate motto reinforced by the personal stories of each soldier we have studied. Bravely ready to help and protect others, they hoped to secure freedom from the German Kaiser's oppression.

Two Cemeteries for Two Men

Walking the hill was haunting but we also wanted to locate, if we could, the final resting place of the two who never came back to America: George T. McNeely and John Milton Paden.

George T. McNeely was lost in the stormy chaos of the battleground on July 29, 1918. Even though his death was witnessed and recorded, his body was never recovered for

✓ Honoring John Milton Paden, Rain Day Boy
killed in action, July 29, 1918, Buried in
Oise-Aisne American Cemetery.
Collection of the authors, 2017.





burial.¹⁰ His parents never had the option of bringing him home. In honor of his memory, George's name was recorded on the Tablets of the Missing at Aisne-Marne American Cemetery in Belleau, France. The visit to this wall was a long-awaited pilgrimage.

We also journeyed to the graveside of John Milton Paden, laid to rest in the company of his comrades at Oise-Aisne American Cemetery, near the Hill 212 battlefield in Fère-en-Tardenois, Picardie, France. We lingered at this spot a while; like so many of the places we had been, it seemed that a visit was long overdue.

The Rain Day Boys

Profiles of each Rain Day Boy have been created at www.MemoryMedallion.com and can be found at www.RainDayBoys.com. A name search at this website allows free viewing of the collected information including biographical details, photographs, grave locations, family tree links, and even rare reel-to-reel footage of Company K before they left Waynesburg in 1917. Memory Medallions have also been placed at each grave location for those buried on U.S. soil. These allow

Francis B. Moore, Rain Day
Boy killed in action, July
29, 1918.

Pennsylvania Archives Project, Greene County
(www.GreeneConnections.com), Elizabeth Taylor
Collection, Item # TAYL-AN001-0002.

for the access of this information right at the location by reading the Memory Medallion's QR code with a smart phone or tablet. These profiles are regularly updated and improved as research continues.

July 28, 1918


- James Leo Farrell

July 29, 1918

- Albert "Bert" Buchanan
- Harold T. Carey
- Hallie J. Closser
- Harry Dunn
- John G. Duvall (died 20 August 1918 from wounds)
- Floyd T. Hickman
- Benjamin A. Manning
- Frederick W. Marshall
- George T. McNeely
- Francis B. Moore
- Charles E. Murphy
- John Milton Paden
- Walter Burtrum Riggle
- Lawrence Leslie Staggers
- William Webster Throckmorton (died 18 September 1918 from pneumonia contracted while hospitalized for wounds)
- Russell Kenneth Yoders
- Norman M. Zahniser


It has been, and continues to be, our heartfelt honor getting to know these young men and tell their stories.



 **Charles E. Murphy, Rain Day Boy killed in action, July 29, 1918.**

Pennsylvania Archives Project, Greene County (www.GreeneConnections.com),
Charles R. Murphy Collection, Item # MURP_AN001_0001.



 **Floyd T. Hickman, Rain Day Boy killed in action, July 29, 1918.**

Pennsylvania Archives Project, Greene County (www.GreeneConnections.com), Marilyn (Brewer) Eichenlaub Collection, Item # EICH_AN002_0002.

Conclusion

Historians know that there is no substitute for direct interaction with the original records, objects, artifacts, and locations central to the events they study. “Holding what they held” and “walking where they walked”—these are the real sensations that breathe life into pages of research. Add to this, the genuine human element, a knowledge of the very personal profiles of the participants, placing them, first, in their time, their community, their family—and, then, understanding how that individual life fit into the larger scenes of history. An army is made soldier by soldier. Here is where history truly lives. Our goal throughout this endeavor is to serve the memories of our Rain Day Boys who left a little town and became part of The Great War. In the words of a beloved poet of 1918:

They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old:

age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning,
we will remember them.

—Laurence Binyon, “Ode of Remembrance” 

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¹ “Sergeant Patterson Talks Interestingly of the War,” *Waynesburg Republican*, Waynesburg, Pa., 7 November 1918, p. 1.

² “Company K, Tenth Regiment, 150 Strong, Leaves for Training Camp at Augusta, GA,” *Washington Observer*, 8 September 1917, p. 3. Includes company roster.

³ “Greene County Heroes Fall in France” article, *Waynesburg Republican*, 15 August 1918, p. 1.

⁴ G. Wayne Smith, *History of Greene County, Pennsylvania*, 2 volumes (Waynesburg: Cornerstone Genealogical Society, 1996), 2: 619, 717 (note 5).

⁵ Association of the 110th Infantry, *History of the 110th Infantry (10th Pa.) of the 28th Division,*

U.S.A., 1917-1919 (Association of the 110th Infantry, 1920), 70 - photo of burial with detailed caption, 210 - witness account of death.


⁶ “Graphic Description of Battle,” *Waynesburg Republican*, 2 January 1919, p. 1.

⁷ Francis Earle Lutz, *The 110th Infantry in the World War* (Haddonfield, N.J.: Francis E. Lutz, 1919), 34-37; digital images, *Google Books* (https://books.google.com/books/about/The_110th_Infantry_in_the_World_War.html?id=TZTGAAAAMAAJ : viewed 2017).

⁸ Edward Martin, “The 110th Regiment in the Great War,” *Waynesburg Republican Greene County Soldiers’ Edition*, 4 July 1919, p. 1-5. The account of the July 29th battle is recorded on p. 2-3.

⁹ “Graphic Description of Battle” article, *Waynesburg Republican*, 2 January 1919, p. 1.

¹⁰ “WWI Veterans Service and Compensation Files, 1917-1919, 1934-1948,” digital images, Ancestry.com (<http://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=60884> : accessed 9 October 2017), George T. McNeely file (service record only, no application for compensation submitted); citing World War I Veterans Service and Compensation File, 1934–1948 (RG 19, Series 19.91), PHMC, Harrisburg.



Looking down the slope of Hill 212 from Grimpettes Woods. This is the view the Germans had of the approaching Allied forces. It has barely changed from the descriptions provided in 1918.

Collection of the authors, 2017.

At last, after the slaughter had become terrible,

we were ordered to fall back, but it seemed impossible to ever do so in the face of that terrible fire. I watched men start to run, but they never made very many steps until a bullet caught them....