

## MEMORIAL DAY REMEMBRANCE - 2017

Adapted by Patty Durso

It is said that a nation reveals itself not only by the men it produces but also by those it honors, those it remembers. Today we solemnly and joyfully recall the lives of eight Allendale neighbors who died in service to this country in the First World War. They were among the 67 men from Allendale who served between the declaration of war in April, 1917 and the Armistice in November, 1918. Some gave their lives in combat; some were taken by injury or illness. All served capably and courageously - and all are distinguished not only by how they died but also by how they lived.

Take Gustave Nadler. He was the son of an ice cream and confectionery merchant and the product of a family dedicated to service. His father, Gustave Nadler, Sr., was the Mayor of Allendale from 1914 through 1918. As Mayor, he was instrumental in establishing a Recreational Park on West Crescent Avenue and also signed an ordinance to formally create the Allendale Fire Department, which up until that time was an autonomous group. The Nadler family resided at 70 Franklin Turnpike and worshipped at the Episcopal Mission of the Epiphany.

Following young Gustave's graduation from Ridgewood High School – which Allendale students attended in those days - he enlisted in the army, going overseas in May, 1918, attached to the 107<sup>th</sup> Infantry. He saw heavy action, fighting valiantly in the trenches at Mount Kemmel and then on the Hindenburg Line, a zone heavily fortified by the German enemy along the border between Belgium and France. By the time Gustave arrived, the Germans had a stronghold three miles deep, ribbed with lengths of barbed wire and established firing positions. The Allied Forces determined to breach this last line of the adversary's defenses. A four day battle was waged, beginning with a marathon bombardment. According to his superiors, Private First Class Nadler came under the heaviest direct and enfilading fire while manning his machine gun post.

He was stationed at the extreme left flank of the Division's line and all contact between Gustave and the other elements of the command was lost. Yet he not only effectively but continuously operated his weapon. He survived the 56-hour battle - and received a citation that commended him for exhibiting the greatest coolness, the greatest courage and the greatest devotion to duty.

And then the 107<sup>th</sup> Infantry moved on. Two weeks later on October 13<sup>th</sup>, as the enemy retreated towards its homeland, it put down a heavy crash of shell fire at the village of St. Souplet. A mere 20 years old, Gustave Nadler was killed in the firefight.

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Gustave's neighbor, Harry Weimar, was 26 years old and firmly established in his career as a Railroad Checker on the New York Central when he enlisted in the Army in September, 1917. From his home on Crescent Avenue, he joined his unit, Company L, 61<sup>st</sup> Infantry, aboard the *Czaritza*, bound for France.

He and his comrades trained tirelessly, on the march and in filthy, disease-ridden trenches, and his division made impressive headway over several months. By August, they had taken the town of Frapelle in the French region of Lorraine and held it against wave after wave of counter-attacks by the Germans. In September, Harry was among the first boys deployed in the St. Mihiel campaign, the operation masterminded by United States General John Pershing to break through the German lines and capture the city of Metz. The attack caught the Germans in the process of retreating, which meant that their guns, their cannons, their transport, indeed all their artillery was not at the ready.

Having caught the enemy unawares, Harry and the American troops were more successful in the assault than expected. But foul weather plagued the offensive, as the trenches the soldiers occupied filled with water and the fields turned to mud, bogging down many of our tanks. Ammunition, weapons and food supplies could not be transported on impassable roads. The Germans fortified their positions - and a further onslaught ensued. Harry, on the cusp of the campaign's end, was grievously wounded on the battlefield and later died.

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In a sign of the need for men at the front, only two weeks passed between the time Marshall Couch enlisted and when he shipped out overseas. He was a Bank Clerk at Colonial Bank and a member of the Allendale Fire Department. Marshall's family lived first on Franklin Turnpike and later moved to new quarters on the corner of Maple and Elm streets. During those intense and precious fourteen days between enlistment and leaving American soil, Marshall married his longtime sweetheart, Ethel Smythe.

Marshall belonged to Company A, 311<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. He fought in several campaigns, chief among them the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, also known as the Battle of the Argonne Forest. Involving 1.2 million American soldiers, it was waged over 47 days, from September 26 until November 11. This single battle cost nearly 27,000 American lives and those of 28,000 Germans, making it the bloodiest battle in American history to that date. Back home in Allendale, just six months after Marshall and Ethyl had wed, this letter was received from his commanding officer:

*“Soldier 1748522, Co “A”, 311<sup>th</sup> Infantry - Marshall H. Couch was killed during our advance on the German Lines just east of Grand Pre, France, on the morning of October 19, 1918. The attack was launched at 3:00AM and our objective was the hills beyond Grand Pre. At day break we met terrific resistance from machine-gun fire. Those of us who were able to secure protection in shell holes were, for the moment, safe. M.H. Couch was among these, but a friend less fortunate was wounded on the battlefield and unable to gain shelter. Private Couch, seeing his compatriot in this predicament, crawled out of the safety of his shell hole and went to his rescue. He endeavored to carry him to safety – but was killed in the attempt.”*

Marshall Couch remains in France, buried in the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery, in Romagne-sous-Montfaucon. He is among friends. The cemetery is home to 14,236 American military dead, nearly all from the First World War.

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The Great War. The War to End All Wars. The war that claimed the lives of five other boys from Allendale. Boys like Jack McDermott – who rose from the rank of private to lieutenant in under two years but who died in a road accident while in uniform. Military boys lost to the great influenza epidemic of 1918, which claimed over 30 million lives in one year, including that of Harold Cook Ackerson, a painter whose family lived in three homes on Mallinson Street, just across the way. Boys like Charles Nidd and his brother, Edward Sherrard Nidd, who grew up on Hillside Avenue and who each, while serving, succumbed to Spanish meningitis, as did their younger brother. Boys like James Hubbard, a Rutgers graduate and sailor who served aboard the escort ship USS Arizona, accompanying President Wilson to the Paris Peace talks at war's end (the same Arizona, incidentally, that ultimately came to rest in the waters of Pearl Harbor in yet another war.) Allendale men, each illustrious in his own way; each having done his part to ensure America's enduring heritage of liberty under law.

Without regard to politics or populism, they answered the call to arms. We respect the moral courage it took to go to war. But above all else, we venerate the physical courage it took to stay in the battle. As evidenced by our gathering here today, one hundred years on, their last chapter has not been told. Their memorial is written not on stones but forever in the hearts of men and women who refuse to forget them.

They sacrificed their lives to shore up the very foundation of this nation. With their comrades they stood, their impermeable resolve and their tender human flesh a barricade between our country and its foes. Who were these men? Extraordinary, ordinary people, whose voices now are quelled. Their silence is our anthem.

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