



War ends 99 years ago; Sets stage for World War II

By Mike Howard
JBM-HH
Public Affairs
Director

It is a cluttered image showing Soldiers, horses and guns – maybe food rations and ammunition – on a road near a bombed out building. The hand-written caption on the yellowed matte says the photo was taken of the 322nd Infantry Regiment at Rovaux, France. The photograph hangs on the wall in my office on Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall, Va, taken “at the noon hour” on the original Armistice Day 99 years ago that ended World War I.

The unit was part of the 81st Infantry Division, known as the Wildcats, which had come to France toward the end of the war to fight for Gen. John J. Pershing. The historic image, kept by a veteran of the war, is part of a collage of items about the division's final days in Europe. It illustrates the personal side of history. The photograph is striking because the Soldiers are not cheerful as we are accustomed to seeing in photos from the timeframe.

The Germans had surrendered and the Armistice was signed at 5 a.m. French time near Paris, agreeing to end hostilities



This photograph was preserved by a Wildcat Soldier who served in World War I. The image hangs in the author's office on JBM-HH.

at 11 a.m. that day – the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month. A war involving 67 million troops from both sides and killing more than 14 million military and civilian people was over. Yet in the photo it looks like the Wildcats are milling about getting their beans and bullets, waiting to be called to the front lines with no sign the war is finished.

The end had a much deeper meaning as it settled in on these war-weary troops.

Also in my collection is a well-worn 1919 “The History of the 321st Infantry and A Brief Historical Sketch of the 81st Division” written by Corporal C. Walton Johnson that chronicles the Wildcats in World War I. The book describes the division's activities while forming in the states and training overseas. The division arrived in France in August 1918 and, in September, was assigned to First Army for the Meuse-Argonne offensive.

Hallowed Ground

The book details the division's involvement in the Meuse-Argonne drive November 9-11. From Johnson's first-person account, it is clear that the division Soldiers fought as if there was no end in sight on the morning of November 11. The Soldiers on the line were not told of the Armistice until 11 a.m. It appears the main fighting force of the division was the 321st Infantry Regiment. The 322nd – the element in the photograph taken at noon on November 11 – was in reserve. The 321st had 231 casualties in the fighting between 6 and 11 a.m. on Armistice Day; 44 killed in action, four died of wounds, 180 wounded and three missing.

My copy of the 1936 book “I Found No Peace” by Webb Miller smells old but it tells the story of the end of World War I. Miller was an American correspondent covering the war. He writes of his search for a good news angle to cover the end of the war. He races to the front to get the story. He arrives at a quarter to 11, 15 minutes before the Armistice.

Even for me today, I would think that would be the place to be.

“What are you doing up here? There's nothing happening here.”

That's what a captain told Miller when he got there.

“I've come to cover

the end of the war – the Armistice.”

“Good God, when is it?” he exclaimed.

“Eleven o'clock. Haven't you heard?”

I find that exchange amazing.

Then Miller writes: “It would have made a better story if I could tell of men cheering, yelling, laughing, and weeping with joy, throwing their tin hats in the air, embracing one another, dancing with delight. But they didn't. The war just ended.”

And on: “Here I was covering the greatest story in the world and nothing was happening. This was the end of the greatest war in the history of the world ... and here on the front line there was less excitement, less emotion, and less joy than you'd find in a lively crap game.”

Miller observes: “These men were too close to get the tremendous significance of the end of the war.”

Johnson, in his Wildcat account, paints more of the picture: “Immediately after hostilities ceased the American lines were consolidated. The companies bivouacked that night on the battlefield at the spot they had reached when firing ceased at 11 a.m.

“The night of November 11 stands out unique in the history of mankind. It was the most memorable night since the dawn of the Christian era. It is hardly possible that man will ever again

witness an event of more transcendent importance and significance to the entire world than the cessation of hostilities on November 11.

“That night the bright light of our camp fires dispelled the dreary darkness that had settled like a pall upon northern France every night the going down of the sun for four long years. Before the night of the 11th, the faint light of a cigarette was the signal for a deadly missile. That night the fields and woods were aglow with bright fires – the signals of peace and victory. The merry laughter and bright, happy faces of the fellows as they sat around their open camp fires told of a joy too deep for words and too sacred for public demonstrations.

“Such demonstrations as followed the receipt of the news of the Armistice in our cities, would have been as much out of place on the front that day as at the funeral of a great and honored personage. We were on hallowed ground – hallowed and forever made sacred to us by the blood of our own comrades, whose mangled and shell-torn bodies still lay around us on the battlefield.”

Interesting Story

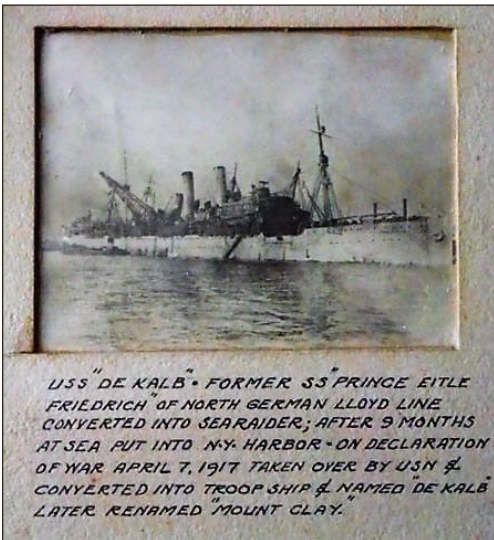
Miller's book contains one chapter written by Roy Howard telling the story of how America ended up celebrating the Armistice on Nov. 7, four days before the actual signing. Howard, an American journalist working for United Press had gotten the word from American Expeditionary Forces officials in Brest, France, on Nov. 6 that the war ended.

So Howard dispatched the news to United Press in New York.

As the rumor spread in France, the information Howard was hearing from American officials – sourcing a French official – seemed to be confirmed by the celebrations in the streets.

After filing the brief story that the Armistice was signed, Howard writes of leaving the cable office and “... delaying a few moments to watch the mad celebration which was taking place on all sides. French

see 99 YEARS, page 2



A photograph of the ship bringing home Wildcat Soldiers in the summer of 1919 is preserved in a collage hanging in the author's office.

Index

Community page 3
Explore D.C. WWI page 4
Ike and Patton pages 5 & 6
Fort Myer in WWI page 8
News Notes page 15

THURS.
53 | 38



FRI.
45 | 26



SAT.
46 | 35



SUN.
52 | 42



Local forecast

shopkeepers and wine merchants, infected by the spirit of the occasion, were bringing great baskets of vin ordinaire (table wine) to the sidewalks and passing the bottles about freely among all who cared to partake. This in itself was to the American doughboys, with their high appreciation of French thrift, an act almost as sensational as the Armistice itself.

"Doughboys, gobs (crowds), poilus (French soldiers), and hundreds of French girls and women who seemed to have sprung from the earth, marched and danced, arms entwined as they sang lustily the popular war-time songs. Motor lorries, their engines backfiring like machine guns, contributed to the uproar."

At the same time, U.S. State Department and War Department officials in Washington received word the war had ended.

Two hours later, Howard was told by the same officials he had heard from originally that the Armistice signing could not be confirmed. Howard filed the correction, but the dispatch was held up by the censors even though the original report two hours earlier went through without delay. This meant that word spread across America that the war was ended based upon what turned out to be an unconfirmed report.

"In New York and the east, the first extras carrying the bulletin announcement of the signing of the Armistice reached the street during the lunch hour (on Nov. 7)," Howard writes. "In the middle west the extras were out before noon and on the Pacific coast in early afternoon. Newspaper presses rolled as never before, and new records were established for newspaper sales. It is doubtful if any other news ever traveled so swiftly or so widely in the United States pre-radio days.

"Telephone exchanges became madhouses. Telegraph offices were swamped. Offices and businesses were deserted. New York's luncheon crowd never went back to business. Impromptu parades were started and grew to gigantic proportions. Lower Broadway in New York invented its first artificial snowstorm. Ticker tape, telephone books, office stationery, and wastebasket contents provided the 'snow.'



Headlines announcing the end of World War I were run in newspapers throughout the U.S. on Nov. 7, 1918. The Armistice was signed Nov. 11, 1918.

"None who participated in the American celebration will ever forget it. Those who did not see it will probably never appreciate its magnitude, its spontaneity or its 'unquenchability.' Germany was known to be beaten. For all practical purposes the war was over. For a fortnight the emotions of America had been under compression and on the verge of explosion. A twenty-word news bulletin furnished the detonating spark.

"... In the minds and the conviction of the American public, the war was over, even if the formalities had not been concluded. People wanted to celebrate. The excuse for a celebration had been furnished. They would permit no kill-joy to function. ... America awoke on the morning of November 8, 1918 with what was probably the greatest national headache in history."

Pressure to End
So the front lines didn't celebrate when the Armistice actually happened, but people celebrated four days earlier behind the lines in France and the United States. Howard writes that other journalists and news outlets were upset at him and United Press for what happened, but that the American public thought little of it. In fact, the celebration after the actual signing of the Armistice on Nov. 11 was a "pale imitation" compared to what had occurred.

One last tidbit of interest. Howard, who wrote his account special for Miller's book in 1936, speculates as to the reason for the rumor. He suggests that Germany planted the idea in Paris of the Armistice being signed prematurely as a sort of information operations act to impact the likelihood of the Armistice being signed at all.

According to Howard, Germany knew the end was near and that Allied leaders "pre-

ferred to follow the retreating German armies right into Berlin. The Germans wanted an Armistice desperately – and wanted it quickly. They were faced with starvations, anarchy, and civil war. Time meant everything. They were fearful that there might be fatal delays. ... But the Allies, though triumphant, were war-weary also. Those behind Allied lines were eager for peace and the return of their soldiers.

"... The thing to do, therefore, was to announce peace and dare the Allied military commanders to delay it longer," Howard writes. "In my opinion, that was what was done, and if ever the 'French official,' who in my belief was in fact a German secret agent working in Paris, tells his story, or if his official report in the German War Office is ever made public, the secret of the false Armistice will be revealed – but not otherwise."

Unstable Times
That is how the "war to end all wars" ended.

The Wildcats left Europe and disbanded upon return to America in the summer of 1919.

The Treaty of Versailles on June 28, 1919, officially ended the war and set the conditions to maintain peace. The treaty came out of the Paris Peace Conference that year – Miller writes of not wanting to go: "I detested the idea of going to the forthcoming Peace Conference to watch the haggling over the ruins of Europe and the war loot Afterward, I knew that I had made a mistake; that I should have been on the ground to witness the formulation of what was to be the diplomatic charter of Europe for nearly a generation."

In his final chapter, Miller addresses the likelihood for world war to once again take hold.

"I have seen the whole edifice erected to maintain peace after the World War undermined. All of it is tottering, and sections of it have crashed in ruins. ... I have watched Europe slump back into a situation far more critical than that of 1914 or any other period in history. ... Ever since the War some of the world's best minds have applied themselves to finding methods of banishing fear from the relations of nations, but they have failed."

A modern-day source for information provides a concise summary:

"No one historic event can be said to have been the origin of World War II," according to Historynet.com (<http://www.historynet.com/world-war-ii>). "Japan's unexpected victory over czarist Russia in the Russo-Japanese War – 1904-05 – left open the door for Japanese expansion in Asia and the Pacific. ... The years between the first and second world wars were a time of instability. The Great Depression that began on Black Tuesday, 1929 plunged the worldwide recession.

"Coming to power in 1933, Hitler capitalized on this economic decline and the deep German resentment due to



The Army's first shoulder patch – 81st Infantry Div. wildcats – approved during World War I.

the emasculating Treaty of Versailles, signed following the Armistice of 1918. Declaring that Germany needed Lebensraum or 'living space,' Hitler began to test the Western powers and their willingness to monitor the treaty's provision. By 1935 Hitler had established the Luftwaffe, a direct violation of the 1919 treaty. Remilitarizing the Rhineland in 1936 violated Versailles and the Locarno Treaties – which defined the borders of Europe – once again. The Anschluss of Austria and the annexation of the rump of Czechoslovakia was a further extension of Hitler's desire for Lebensraum.

"Italy's desire to create the Third Rome pushed the nation to closer ties with Nazi Germany. Likewise, Japan, angered by their exclusion in Paris in 1919, sought to create a Pan-Asian sphere with Japan in order to create a self-sufficient state."

Personal Items

On the table in my office, there is an old page from a three-ring binder in a document protector. Pinned to the paper with a single straight pin is a rudimentary homemade felt patch, a World War I-era patch for a U.S. Army uniform. It is green with a faded black piece of felt in the center. Someone wrote below the rough stitching that it was the unit symbol for the 81st Infantry Division, a unit of draft Soldiers from South Carolina, North Carolina, Florida and Puerto Rico – although I have found no other documentation that confirms any Soldiers came to the division from Puerto Rico.

The division's 1919 history book gives background to the patch and its World War I creation. The 81st was first activated in 1917 at what was then Camp Jackson, South Carolina. They bivouacked next to Wildcat Creek during training. The division's commander, Maj. Gen. Charles Bailey, and staff named the unit after the Wildcat Creek. They felt the wildcat symbolized the viciousness of the division – some Soldiers even caught a wildcat and kept it caged as a mascot. So the leaders wanted

that symbol as part of their uniform. Apparently, Bailey also thought it would help build unit esprit and morale while making it easier to identify his men and equipment on the battlefield.

So Bailey directed his men to make the patches of the wildcat and sew them onto their uniforms before they went to Europe in the late summer of 1918. According to the unit's 1946 history book, "The 81st Infantry Wildcat Division in World War II," Pershing's staff opposed the idea. Apparently, they felt it interfered with the cohesiveness of the American Expeditionary Forces. But Pershing approved it in October 1918 – Bailey appealed personally to him for the approval.

Other units adopted it and that was the birth of unit patches as we know them today.

Next to the old, crudely made Wildcat unit patch from World War I on the table and below the collage on the wall is a baseball from sometime during World War II after the Wildcats were reactivated in Alabama in 1942. It is signed by the players on one of the unit teams that had formed in the division before it deployed to combat once again in 1944.

Even with war, life was normal to a degree I guess.

And, finally – oddly – there is a LIFE magazine cover dated June 5, 1944. It is creased from being folded and placed in a duffel bag during the war by one of the Wildcats' squad leaders. He wrote the names on the faces of his Soldiers he identified in the photo. The caption does not identify the 81st, but says the Soldiers would be part of the Normandy invasion.

Somewhere in the formation but not in the photograph is my father.

The division did not return to Europe, though – the Soldiers would fight in the Pacific.

That is my story of our World Wars. My father was one of the 46,000 Wildcats who saw combat in World War I and World War II. He served in the second – joining the more than 18 million American service members to fight the two wars.



The 81st Div. deactivated after World War I in 1919. The unit reactivated in 1942 for World War II. The baseball shown belonged to the author's father's unit.

Stay connected! www.army.mil/jbmmh Facebook: [Facebook.com/jbmmh](https://www.facebook.com/jbmmh) Flickr: [Flickr.com/photos/jbmmh](https://www.flickr.com/photos/jbmmh) Twitter: [@jbmmh](https://twitter.com/jbmmh) Slideshare: [slideshare.net/jbmmh](https://www.slideshare.net/jbmmh)

Pentagram
703-696-5401

The Pentagram is an authorized publication for members of the Department of Defense. Contents of the Pentagram are not necessarily the official views of the U.S. Government, the Department of Defense, the Department of the Army, the Department of the Navy, or Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall. The content of the publication is the responsibility of the Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall Public Affairs Office. Pictures not otherwise credited are U.S. Army photographs. News items should be submitted to the Pentagram, 204 Lee Ave., Stop 38, Fort Myer, VA 22211-1199. They may also be e-mailed to share.e.walker@civilmail.mil. The Pentagram is printed by offset every Thursday as a civilian enterprise newspaper by APG Media of Chesapeake, LLC. APG Media of Chesapeake, LLC is located at 29080 Annapark Drive, Easton, MD 21601. Telephone (301) 921-2800. Commercial advertising should be placed with the printer. APG Media of Chesapeake, LLC Publications is a private firm in no way connected with the Department of the Army or Department of the Navy. The appearance of advertisements in this publication, to include all inserts and supplements, does not constitute an endorsement by the Department of the Army or Department of the Navy of the products or services advertised. Everything advertised in this publication shall be made available for purchase, use, or patronage without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, marital status, physical handicap, political affiliation, or any other non-merit factor of the purchaser, user or patron. A confirmed violation of this policy of equal opportunity by an advertiser shall result in the refusal to

- Col. Patrick M. Dugan
Commander
- Command Sgt. Maj. Stephen M. Harris
Command Sergeant Major
- Michael L. Howard
Public Affairs Director
- Sharon Walker
Command Information Officer
- Brent S. Wucher
Editor
brent.s.wucher.civ@mail.mil
- Matthew Getz
Graphic Designer
- Delonte Harrod
Staff Writer
charrad03@civilmail.com
- Julia Lebus
Staff Writer
jlebus03@civilmail.com
- Arthur Mondale
Staff Writer
awright@civilmail.com
- Jim Dresbach
Staff Writer
jrdresbach@civilmail.com
- Francis Chung
Staff Photographer
fchung@civilmail.com