

World War I: Discovering Facts About My Wisconsin Ancestor Soldiers

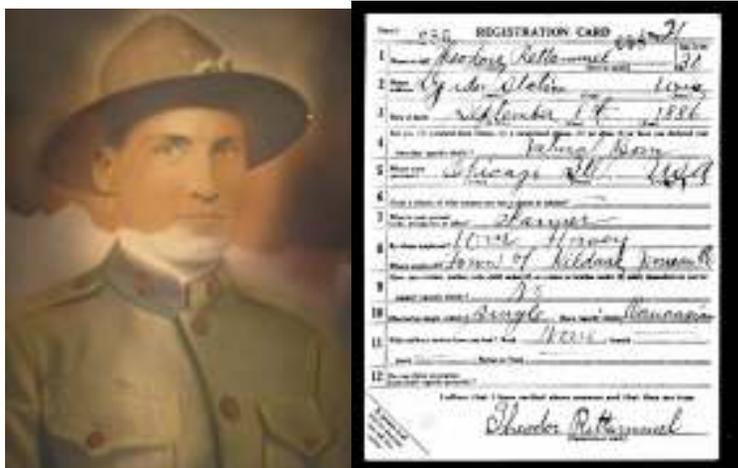
As I was growing up I had heard stories of an ancestor who served in World War I and was an uncle to my father. However, my own father never knew this uncle since he died before my father was born. My Great-Uncle Theodore Rettammel died in March 1919, while in the military but after the armistice on November 11, 1918, that ended World War I. The information I originally had about him was limited. As well as many from his generation were also deceased before I took an interest in genealogy, in the late 1970s. Theodore's tombstone was always something I saw every Memorial Day when my Dad would put flowers on his grave. I also knew something about his dates of birth and death since they are listed on the tombstone in the family cemetery in Wisconsin.

Over the years, I discovered a photo of a few of my great uncles on my paternal side that served in World War I. One of these was (as learned) of my Great Uncle Theodore. So, between seeing his tombstone and the only picture I have of him (below), he was in a way always in my family history but never with any facts of who and what happened to him as Doughboy in World War I.

As I recently discovered two Paternal Great Uncles participated and were wounded: August 3, 1918.

Both were Organization Assigned to: Both in Company "D" 128th Infantry, 64th Brigade, 32nd Division.

1) **Private - Theodore A. Rettammel**, from Lyndon Station, WI.



- Born Chicago, Illinois 1886
- Service: Enlisted in Wisconsin National Guard, June 29, 1917, Camp Douglas, Wisc.
- Overseas: May 23, 1918 to December 18, 1918.
- In Military Hospital: Camp Sherman, Ohio – December 1918 to March, 1919.

- Died March 14, 1919 result of wounds sustained during war and Pulmonary Tuberculosis.¹

2) **Private - William Wendland**, from Lyndon Station, WI.



- Born March 17, 1887 in Lyndon Station, WI.
- Service: Enlisted in Wisconsin National Guard, June 4, 1917,
- Camp Douglas, Wisc.
- Overseas: February 18, 1918 to February 4, 1919.
- Honorably Discharged: February 24, 1919, Camp Grant, Illinois.

Both gassed by inhalation of Chlorine during battle²

Great-Uncle William Wendland survived the war, returning to his hometown where he died December 7, 1953.

Service Records³

One of my interest was to locate the place and battle where my great-uncles were wounded and gassed. I visited the Wisconsin Veteran's Museum in Madison, WI. Recently to look for his service record and found that he enlisted in the 3rd Infantry Wisconsin National Guard on June 29, 1917 at Camp Douglas, Wisconsin. Later the U.S. War Department directed the National Guard to form the 32nd Division on July 15, 1917 and thus Theodore was transferred to Company 128th Infantry 32nd Division of American Expeditionary Force, on August 4, 1917. The 32nd Division was composed of troops from Wisconsin and Michigan. The division was trained in Waco, Texas at Camp McArthur. Eventually Theodore served overseas from May 23, 1918 to December 18, 1918 (nearly 7 months). Wounded in battle

¹ Ohio Deaths, 1908-1953, database FamilySearch.

² Wisconsin Veterans Museum's World War I Database checks, by Bob Rettammel, Rettammel Genealogy Service, LLC. William Wendland service record shows he is a member of "Company D, 128th Infantry", he was present in the Battle at Chateau Thierry August 3, 1918. The document has William listed as "Gassed Chateau Thierry 8-3-18". Also Theodore A. Rettammel service record shows he is in "Company D 128 Infantry" and listed with wounded in action August 3, 1918 and on his Death Certificate of March 14, 1919, at U.S. Army Base Hospital Camp Sherman, Ohio, his cause of death is listed as pulmonary tuberculosis with contributory gas inhalation chlorine, August 2, 1918. Note the discrepancy between the service record and death certificate for date on which Theodore was said to be gassed; however, the battle of Chateau Thierry took place over several days prior and after August 2 or 3rd.

³ Website links to learn more on Red Arrow (32nd Division) in World War I
<http://museum.dva.state.wi.us/wwiroster>

on August 2 or 3, 1918. Returned to the United States in December 1918 and died at Camp Sherman, Ohio on March 14, 1919, age 32.

Theodore Rettammel Return to US⁴



This record shows my Great-Uncle Theodore Rettammel #4 returning to the United States, December 9, 1918, aboard SS Zeelandia, Port of Embarkment St. Marzaire. His group classification was listed as surgical lying aboard the ship.

Wounded in What Battle?

Battle of Château-Thierry – aka Second Marne⁵

Theodore was overseas and said to be wounded in battle on August 2 or 3, per two sources, one his death certificate from Ross County, Ohio reports the 2nd and service record says the 3rd. During this time the American Expeditionary Force was fighting in the Second Battle of the Marne and Chateau-Thierry. Specifically, on August 1st an attack by 63rd and 64th Infantry Brigades of the 32nd Division attacked and forced the enemy to abandon Bellevue Farm. On August 3rd, the division pushed forward to the Vesle River and the 32rd Division captured the town of Fismes, France, in northeast France. Theodore as a soldier in Company D, 128th Infantry was part of the 64th Brigade that fought on those days and area.

I have learned the battle and area where he was wounded. I also know that he stayed overseas until December 9, 1918. This was 4 months after his being gassed and wounded. I also know he was hospitalized when he was back for 3 months until his death on March 14, 1919 while still in the Army. The time from August 4 to December 9th I still do not know how much he suffered because of the initial damage he experienced or how much more fighting he did. I can only guess

⁴ Fold3.com. Retrieved 24 February, 2019.

⁵ The Town of Château-Thierry is situated on the Marne River. Chateau-Thierry is situated at 56 miles from Paris.

that he continued to fight and eventually his wounds in early August made him too weak to continue.

Aisne-Marne Campaign (a.k.a. Second Battle of the Marne, a.k.a. Château-Thierry)

Below is a partial description from the original written by Red Arrow – 32nd Division Veteran Association, and in the book, The 32nd Division in the World War. Madison, WI: Wisconsin War History Commission, 1920.

To see full description of their fine work go to <http://www.32nd-division.org/history/ww1/32-ww1.html>

On 26 July 1918 the Division proceeded to the region of Château-Thierry, as part of the 38th French Corps, 6th French Army, in the tip of the famous Marne salient.

*After nightfall on **29 July**, the 64TH Brigade (127TH and 128TH Infantry) began to filter forward to relieve the 3^D Infantry Division in the front line, on the Ourcq in the vicinity of Ronchères. The 3^D Division had been fighting continuously since the German offensive started about 15 July and was exhausted while attempting to overcome strong German resistance in the Bois de Grimpettes.*

*On the morning of 31 July, both Infantry Brigades of the 32^D Division went into action side by side. The attack was renewed on the morning of **1 August 1918**. The objective of the 63^D Brigade was Hill 230. The mission of the 64TH was to take Bellevue Farm, which had stopped the attack the day before. The Germans resisted desperately and were amply supported by machine guns and artillery. But "Les Terribles" were not to be denied. The objectives were gained and after dark the 32^D Division dominated Hill 230. The Germans were forced to retreat after they lost this commanding high ground. The situation was now such that the commander of the 6th French Army thought it probable that a consolidated advance could break through. Such an advance was ordered to begin on the morning of **2 August**. The German resistance was not as stubborn as it had been over the last few days. As a result, the 32^D Division advanced rapidly. The pursuit was continued to a line north of the village of Dravegny, which the 32^D reached by nightfall, after an advance of about 6 km.*

*On **3 August**, the pursuit was resumed, and our troops continued to steadily gain ground, although meeting with increased resistance, especially on the left flank, where the 42^D Division was unable to advance as rapidly as the 32^D. By the end of the day, the Division's front line had advanced about 7 km to the hills overlooking the valley of the Vesle, about 1 km south of the Vesle on the left and 2 km south of Fismes on the right. Here considerable resistance was met from the German rear guard, which was making a stand to protect the withdrawal over the river.*

On 4 August the 127TH moved out toward Fismes, while the 63^D Brigade attacked the railroad yards on their front. The enemy had no intentions of yielding without a bitter battle and by means of very heavy artillery and machine gun fire was able to hold the town and railroad yards during the early hours of the afternoon. In its attack on Fismes, the 127TH was badly cut up and late in the day Colonel Langdon organized a provisional battalion out of what was left of his regiment and sent it forward to storm the town. His shattered companies made a desperate assault and finally succeeded, about nightfall, in passing through the town and establishing a position on the south bank of the river. On the left, the 63^D Brigade took the railroad yards and succeeded in getting a few small patrols across the river during the night but was unable to maintain them there so they were withdrawn.

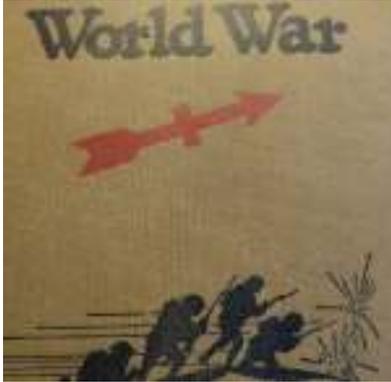
On 5 August, the 127TH gave their attention to mopping up the town. Attempts were also made to cross the river, but without success. On the night of 5 August, the 3^D Battalion of the 128TH, the only strong battalion left in the 64TH Brigade, was ordered into Fismes to reinforce the 127TH. On the morning of 6 August, the 127TH was relieved from Fismes. There were still German snipers in the town, and the 128TH continued to mop up the place. In the eastern half of the town German and American patrols clashed and it was nightfall before the Americans could claim anything like control of the city.

It was during this action that the 32^D Division earned the nickname of “Les Terribles”. When this fight first started General de Mondesir, the 38th French Corps Commander, under whose orders the 32^D was serving at the time, went to the front to see how the Americans were conducting the battle. After he personally observed the 32nd clearing the Germans out of their powerful positions with regularity and determination, he exclaimed “Oui, Oui, Les soldats terrible, tres bien, tres bien!” General Mangin heard of it and referred to the 32^D Division as “Les Terribles” when he asked for the Division to join his famous 10th French Army of shock troops north of Soissons. He later made the nickname official when he incorporated it in his citation for their terrific punch at Juvigny.



Chateau-Thierry Monument – East Face of Monument⁶

⁶ Designed by Paul P. Crey of Philadelphia, the Chateau-Thierry Monument was constructed by the American Battle Monuments Commission to commemorate the sacrifices and achievements of American and French fighting men in the region, and the friendship and cooperation of French and American forces during World War I.



Cover of Book: *The 32nd Division in the World War, 1920*⁷

The Division selected a red arrow piercing a line to show that the division went through every line the enemy threw up before them. The insignia did not get officially approved until November 11, 1918, the last day of the war.

References:

Hanton, Carl, Captain. *The 32nd Division in the World War*. Madison, WI: Wisconsin War History Commission, 1920.

"Aisne-Marne American Cemetery and Memorial" (PDF). American Battle Monuments Commission, U.S. Government. :

https://web.archive.org/web/20090704191146/http://www.abmc.gov/cemeteries/cemeteries/am_pict.pdf.

Retrieved 24 February 2019 by Bob Rettammel.

Remembering the Event from 100 years Ago: Link to Wisconsin Historical Society Library and Archives, <https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS15202>

⁷ *The 32nd Division in the World War*, Copyright 1920 by the Wisconsin War History Commission, Madison, WI (author's family copy).