

THE BRIEF MILITARY CAREER OF PRIVATE LAWRENCE EDWARD FREEZE

Introduction. With the need for rapid projection of United States troops into the European combat area toward the close of World War I, many young American men trained quickly, deployed just as hurriedly, and when in Europe met a fateful death in the grueling war of attrition. One particular tour of duty by a Tennessean, that of Private Lawrence Edward Freeze of Summitville, conformed to this paradigm of military response that speedily followed a diplomatic shift from isolationism to engagement. The heroic but reluctant sacrifice by the American people of their sons to the Great War on foreign soil demonstrated the reality of personal grief as a heavy cost for government perceived necessity. After the war, the hallowed memory of deceased veterans transformed the nation's bitter anguish into resolute consolation. For Private Freeze and thousands more, the urgency of the world situation characterized their selfless sacrifice as "not in vain."

The early life of Lawrence Edward Freeze. In 1894, Sallie Ida Robinson and Thomas Jefferson Freeze celebrated the Christmas season in a very special way. They married on December 31 and started the new year as husband and wife.¹ A wedding in Summitville, Tennessee no doubt occasioned notice. Dubbed "Lick Skillet" in the mid-1850s when the Sparta Branch of the Nashville, Chattanooga and St. Louis Railway stimulated settlement in the central part of Coffee County, Summitville totaled less than 500 population from only a few families.

¹Christine Smith, *The John Rufus Freeze Family: A Genealogy of the Freeze Family from Coffee County, Tennessee* (Manchester, TN: Mrs. Lyndon Smith, 1992), 5.

With the arrival of the new year, the small village had one more family. But Thomas and Sallie anticipated nothing extravagant from their modest way of life in a small town.²

Thomas farmed the land, and Sallie centered her activities around domestic chores and raising a family. The young newlyweds—Thomas was twenty-two years old and Sallie was only seventeen—wasted no time in starting their family. Early in 1895, Sallie got pregnant, and on October 19 the Freezes welcomed their firstborn child into the world—Lawrence Edward Freeze.³ Without question, Thomas waxed euphoric. Not only did he have a son to carry on the family name, he also acquired a home-grown farm hand. The latter commodity provided an important economic boost to poor farm families, a benefit comparable to low salaried laborers in industrial settings.

Under normal circumstances, little Lawrence would have grown up on the farm, served as an apprentice to his father, tilled the soil for bread and broth, and eked out his natural existence “by the sweat of his brow” among “thorns and thistles.”⁴ But the world of young Lawrence fell short of anything normal. In a few short years, Lawrence would be “cut off” by a cataclysmic world war that would snuff out millions of young lives and revolutionize the world.

²Census data for the Tenth Civil District of Coffee County, that included Pocahontas, Shady Grove, and Summitville, listed 210 dwellings with approximately 1,060 individuals. *Twelfth Census of Population, 1900: Tennessee, Coffee County* (Washington, DC: Bureau of the Census Microfilm Laboratory, 1978).

³Smith, *The John Rufus Freeze Family*, 6, 16.

⁴See Genesis 3:18-19.

Like most kids in a small Tennessee town at the turn of the century, Lawrence Edward experienced the ups and downs of growing up. He attended school, played games with friends, and did chores on the farm. But he probably grew up lonely, since he did not enjoy the benefits of extended family during his childhood. Lawrence did not know any of his grandparents. His father's dad apparently had abandoned the family, and his father's mom died before Lawrence was born. Sallie's parents already had died as well. Lawrence had no brothers, and this conceivably caused some isolation for him. And his mother passed away when he was only twelve years old. At a very young age, "Big Brother" Larry became "Mama" to his younger sisters—Ruth Adella, Ida Adelaide, Vina Pauline, and Tommie Nora.⁵

This situation did not last long. Before three years passed, Thomas married Mattie Elizabeth Rogers, a daughter of John and Alice Rogers of Cannon County. Thomas was now thirty-nine years old, Mattie was thirty-three, and Lawrence was fifteen. In the fall of 1914, the family welcomed the birth of Imogene,⁶ and two summers later J. W. or "Jay" was born. Lawrence finally had a brother, although he was a half-brother. He would never see, though, the other children of Thomas and Mattie—Clifford, Clayton, Lillian, and Geneva.⁷ By the time they were born, Lawrence had left home for an ordeal from which he would never return.

⁵Smith, *The John Rufus Freeze Family*, 5-6.

⁶Imogene died on her birthday two years later.

⁷Smith, *The John Rufus Freeze Family*, 5-6.

*The background of United States involvement in World War I.*⁸ With the outbreak of the Great War in August of 1914, Americans once again rethought the issue of isolationism versus global engagement. An isolationist mentality had plagued the nation since the days of the Monroe Doctrine that restricted United States involvement to the Western hemisphere and left European affairs to Europeans. The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, Hapsburg heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, by the young Serbian nationalist Gavrilo Princip sparked a chain reaction of events in the summer of 1914. A series of loosely arranged but obligatory nation-state treaties plus the miscue of Russian war mobilization plans brought many nations into global conflict.

The Allies included Great Britain, France, Russia, Italy, Portugal, Serbia, Romania, and North Africa, and the Central Powers combined Germany with Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and the Ottoman Empire. The United States cherished historic ties to Britain and reaped economic benefit from heavy involvement in London banking as well as British commerce. This plus American aversion to Prussian aristocracy, as well as gross distortion of Germany's intentions, led the United States to favor the Allies.

Because technological advances such as aircraft, poison gas, and new types of artillery gave neither the Allies nor the Central Powers an advantage, the war quickly stalemated into a

⁸Adapted from United States History II lecture by Michael R. Bradley, "World War I and Normalcy" (Lynchburg, TN: Motlow State Community College, 14 July 1999), personal notes of David W Fletcher, Manchester, TN.

brutal war of attrition. This allowed the United States time to ponder and delay involvement, while 60,000 British casualties fell in three hours during the Battle of the Somme River and some 90,000 Allied troops capitulated during a three-month period in August 1916.

While the Western Front stalled, the Germans sought an advantage by wielding influence on events in Russia, namely, the collapse of the Russian economy, the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II, the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, and the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. With Russian pacified and the Eastern Front buffered by the Baltics, Poland, and German occupation of the wheat-rich Ukraine, the Germans turned their attention back to the Western Front.

The Germans began to threaten important shipping lanes to Britain and the Continent with their new policy of “unrestricted submarine warfare” that targeted all ships. German submarines, quite slow and very crude by modern standards, could not chase effectively, but they proved deadly when waiting in lair. As early as May 1915, the Germans had sunk the British passenger liner *Lusitania* en route to Liverpool from New York, just off the coast of southern Ireland. The British lost some 1,200 passengers, including about 200 Americans, as well as secret military cargo on board. This attack against civilians outraged Americans, and under intense pressure from the United States, the Germans agreed in the Sussex Pledge to back off their *U-Boats*.

After the failure of President Woodrow Wilson’s “peace without victory” initiatives, Britain and France appealed to the United States for help. As their resources steadily declined, the Allies began to recall the wounded to battle. But America continued to delay. The goad

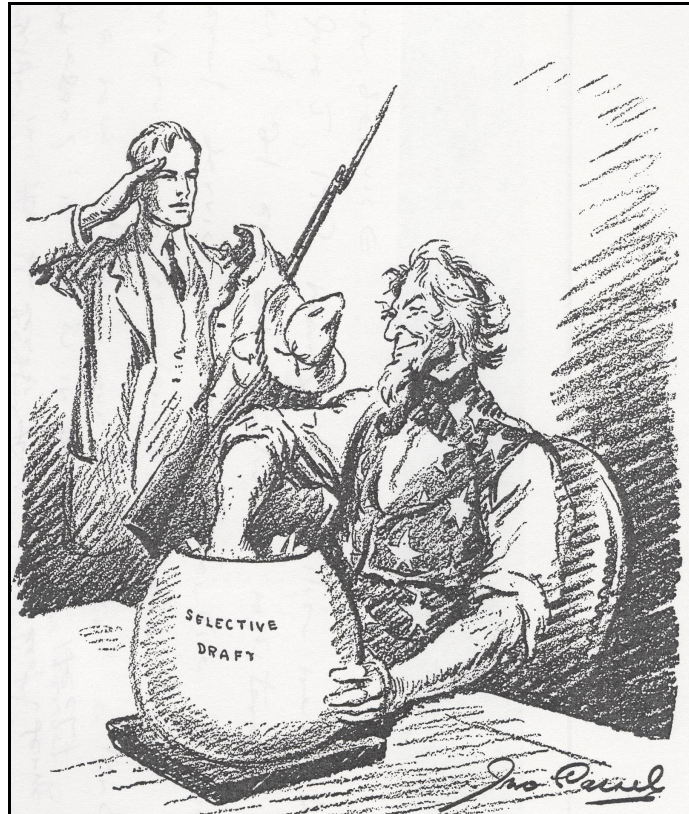
finally came when United States intelligence personnel intercepted an anti-gringo communique allegedly sent by the Germans to Mexican authorities. This infamous Zimmerman telegram incensed popular opinion against the Germans and prodded the reluctant United States to take sides.⁹ In April 1917, President Wilson asked Congress for a declaration of war. Congress passed the declaration with only one dissenting vote, cast by Jeanette Rankin, a pacifist and a member of the House of Representatives from Montana. With war declared and American neutrality put aside, the United States joined the Allies in their fight against the “Cruel Beast” on the European Continent. All these events seemed distant to Lawrence Freeze and his family. But all these things affected the Freeze family and millions more, as the Great War continued to rock the world with violence.



“Our Answer” by Harry Murphy in the *Chicago Herald-Examiner*. Source: George J. Hecht, *The War in Cartoons* (New York: Garland, 1971), 55.

⁹For other factors leading up to United States involvement, see Robert H. Ferrell, *Woodrow Wilson and World War I: 1917-1921* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1985), 8.

Conscription, training, and deployment. The United States government and the military faced an immense challenge. When Congress declared war, the Army discovered serious deficiencies in combat capability. Only a small number of Army regulars were ready for action. Officers lacked training, materiel was outdated, equipment was broken, and vehicles were unserviceable.¹⁰ The situation obviously had deteriorated from an earlier opportunity that the



“At Your Service” by J. H. Cassel in the *New York World*.
Source: Hecht, *The War in Cartoons*, 65.

government let slip away. In 1916, President Wilson positioned over 150,000 militia along the Mexican border as a “snare” for what proved to be General John Pershing’s vain pursuit of the elusive General Doroteo Arango, alias Poncho Villa.¹¹ It was plausible that “here were enough troops to form half a dozen divisions, and if [the United States] had entered France the next

¹⁰See Ferrell, *Woodrow Wilson and World War I*, 14-15.

¹¹Robert H. Ferrell and Richard Natkiel, *Atlas of American History* (New York, NY: Facts On File, 1993), 81.

spring with those divisions equipped and ready for action, along with the regulars, the war might have been ended in 1917, and all the frightful losses of 1918 saved.”¹² Perhaps things could have been different, but “what ifs” gave no comfort to bereaved widows nor solace to aching hearts of close relatives after the fact. The reality was that Congress after bitter debate passed the Selective Service Law on May 19, 1917. Nothing short of an astonishing mass mobilization of American men followed. In a few months, the nation effectively transformed raw recruits into a juggernaut fighting force that deployed at the precise moment of the Allies’ greatest need.¹³

The Wilson administration decided to rely not on volunteers but on a draft organized with considerable care by the War Department. The administration wisely utilized local polling places with ample personnel for the registration process. The first registration occurred on June 5, and during the course of the day approximately ten million young men, ages twenty-one to thirty, registered for the draft.¹⁴ For the actual selection, a series of lotteries began toward the end of July. The use of local volunteers for both county and state boards softened considerably the bureaucratic processes of the Council of National Defense.

The relative poverty of the South, however, limited available monies, and this hampered the operation in most areas. Tennessee fortunately stood apart as an exception to such

¹²William S. Woods, *Colossal Blunders of the War* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1930), 12.

¹³See Ferrell, *Woodrow Wilson and World War I*, 16.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

inefficiency. Exercising close supervision, Major Rutledge Smith, Chairman of the Tennessee State Council of Defense, centralized all departments, controlled the appointment of chairmen, and signed all communications. He singlehandedly made Tennessee's council the most effective in the South.¹⁵ In all, about 475,000 Tennesseans registered with around 350,000 completing the classification process. Of these, over 60,000 actually were drafted.¹⁶

Coffee County provided its fair share with 1,170 men registering in June 1917, 161 in June and August 1918, and another 1,754 in September 1918, for a total of 3,085 registrants. The local board deferred six hundred sixty-three registrants for reasons of dependency, fifty-eight for agricultural reasons, and seventeen for industrial reasons. The county also recorded one discharge, one dishonorable discharge, two fraudulent enlistments, and five deserters—Marion Baltimore and Iverson Clark from Manchester, and John Clark, Ollie Kendrick, and James McNutt from Tullahoma. Out of the actual number of draftees, the training camps accepted four hundred and two, but they relegated four hundred fifteen to general service, fifty-three to limited service, one to a remediable category, and disqualified one hundred.¹⁷ Among those disqualified, the local newspaper, the *Manchester Times*, reported two cases of “deferment” by self-mutilation

¹⁵William J. Breen, *Uncle Sam At Home: Civilian Mobilization, Wartime Federalism, and the Council of National Defense, 1917-1919* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1984), 99.

¹⁶Margaret Wolfe, “World War I,” *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, edited by Carroll Van West (Nashville, TN: Rutledge Hill, 1998), 1078.

¹⁷*World War Record of Ex-Soldiers of Coffee County, State of Tennessee*, compiled by Mrs. Rutledge Smith and the Tennessee American Legion Auxiliary (Nashville, TN: Tennessee State Library and Archives, 1933-1935), microform, II-III, 81-82.

in Warren County. One man shot himself and the other shot off his toe. Both men were unnamed. Joe Douglas managed a discharge when he broke his leg in a runaway horse and buggy accident. And Ophrey Duncan avoided military service with a gunshot wound to his right hand and with seditious talk while at Camp Gordon (i.e., “that he would rather shoot President Wilson than the Kaiser, etc.”).¹⁸

The local five-member Selective Service Board and the three-member Legal Advisory Board, both headquartered in Manchester, kept busy with government directives for ongoing registration,¹⁹ classification determination, examinations, and deferment appeals. The public stayed informed due to specific information published in the *Manchester Times* to include lists of draftees along with their residence and classification category. The front page of the August 16 *Times* featured the full list of Coffee County’s first draftees under the heading, “TWENTY FIVE FROM EACH TOWN: Tullahoma and Manchester Tie for First Place in the Draft.” Both towns supplied twenty-five men each with eight from Wartrace, five apiece from Hillsboro and Morrison, four singly from Beechgrove and Normandy, and only one from Summitville. A subheading to the article noted, “Summitville Supplies Only One in First 77 Men Called to Colors in the U.S. Army.” That one was Lawrence Edward Freeze. After Freeze’s selection, the

¹⁸*Manchester Times*, 13 September 1917, 27 September 1917, and 25 July 1918.

¹⁹The government disclosed these to the public on November 20, 1917. *Manchester Times*, 22 November 1917.

family certainly felt deep emotions, but they kept no record of what they felt, whether pride, sadness, or a mixture of both.²⁰

Lawrence was inducted into the United States Army at Manchester on Sunday, September 23. Immediately, he and forty-one others boarded a train for camp. The September 27 *Times* documented the event with the headline, “NEARLY HALF HUNDRED MEN OFF TO CAMPS: Coffee County Sends Soldiers to Train for War With the Kaiser.” Several hundred well-wishers gathered at the train depot for the 7:15 A.M. roll call in order to bid farewell to the group. A. L. Davidson, Chairman of the Coffee County Selective Service Board, read the mobilization order, and Tim Bush acted as special lieutenant for the squad until it reached camp. The *Times* article gave Camp Gordon in Atlanta as their destination, but according to his service records Freeze trained at Camp Sevier in Greenville, South Carolina.²¹ The men from Coffee County probably trained at Camp Gordon for about a month, and then they were transferred to Camp Sevier.²² Sergeant John A. Chumbley, one of the first draftees from Manchester, reported this change for

²⁰Surely, the family suffered grief over the death of Lawrence’s youngest sister, Tommie Nora, on July 18. She was only eleven years old. Smith, *The John Rufus Freeze Family*, 6, 16.

²¹*World War I Gold Star Records*, file for Lawrence Freeze: Coffee County (Nashville, TN: Tennessee State Library and Archives, 1979), microform.

²²Earlier in July, the War Department formed the 30th Division at Camp Sevier from various National Guard units out of North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee. In October, inductees from Camps Gordon (Georgia), Jackson (South Carolina), and Pike (Georgia) completed the Division. *Order of Battle of the United States Land Forces in the World War: American Expeditionary Forces, Divisions*, compiled by Historical Section, Army War College (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1931), 163.

Company K, 325th Infantry at Camp Gordon, “We had some sad news this morning—received word that probably we would move to Greenville, S.C., or Columbia, S.C. We have become attached to this place—nice, warm barracks, plenty of hot and cold water for shower baths, and in fact, the best sanitary regulations I ever saw. For one, I am much pleased with my situation, and consider myself exceedingly fortunate in having this privilege of serving my country in this hour of grief.”²³

At any rate, Freeze joined twelve others who served with the 320th Machine Gun Battalion until October 14 and then with the 117th Infantry for the duration of their enlistment. The twelve included Leonard Anderson and Wiley Roberts from Hillsboro; Homer Brandon, John Brown, James Elkins, and William Lemmons from Manchester; Farriss Dickerson, Joseph Harper, Lonnie Moore, and George Rayburn from Tullahoma; Frank Rackley from Normandy; and Arthur Stevens from somewhere in Coffee County.²⁴ Of these, only John Brown and Lawrence Freeze did not return home. When Private Lawrence Freeze left Manchester and waved goodbye to his family, he had only one year and two days before his death. He spent the rest of his life in the service of his country.

Men from Coffee County trained at Camp Shelby in Mississippi, Camps Jackson and Sevier in South Carolina, and in the North at Camp Mills in New York, and Camps Hancock and

²³*Manchester Times*, 18 October 1917.

²⁴These men averaged twenty-four years in age. *World War Record of Ex-Soldiers of Coffee County*, 1-67.

Merritt in New Jersey.²⁵ Yankees reciprocally learned their combat skills on Rebel soil as well as their native soil. A new post-Reconstruction cooperation developed that actually restored some prosperity to the South that had been destroyed during the Civil War.²⁶ Makeshift camps sprung up across both North and South. By the close of 1917, these cantonments housed some 1.8 million soldiers of the “National Army.” Each cantonment of twenty-two barracks held a regiment of infantry of about 3,500 men with headquarters, quartermaster, kitchen, laundry and recreation facilities, post exchange, and a hospital. The troops also required sizeable acreage for drills and rifle ranges. Constructing the camps employed large numbers of carpenters and other laborers, and this cost the government nearly a billion dollars.²⁷

Some camps offered less than adequate accommodations. Reflecting on the miserable conditions, General Peter Traub quipped, “I never want to see another one of those camps in America!”²⁸ The general spoke appropriately from the perspective of his position as a commander, because he knew that almost 50,000 soldiers succumbed to pneumonia in the cantonments. But the Army provided what it could—food, clothing, and a cot in the barracks or a tent—along with twenty-five dollars pay per month with an additional eight dollars for foreign

²⁵*Service Record Book of Men and Women of Manchester, Tennessee and Community* (Manchester, TN: V. F. W. Post No. 5031, n.d.), 23-59.

²⁶Louis B. Wright, *South Carolina: A Bicentennial History* (New York, NY: Norton, 1976), 202.

²⁷Ferrell, *Woodrow Wilson and World War I*, 18-19.

²⁸Woods, *Colossal Blunders of the War*, 16.

service. The Army also paid married soldiers an allotment in kind for spouse and children, and the government made available to all recruits inexpensive life insurance.²⁹

Inadequacies aside, J. M. Brandon of Manchester felt confident about his experience at Camp Gordon. After about a month at camp, he wrote home. "The camp is about completed. I hear brass bands and the sound of the drum, and streets crowded with men marching. It looks like there are men enough here to go get the Kaiser's goat. I have heard the old men tell about an army of men, how they would move timber and dig trenches and all of those things, but never before have I understood it as I do now. I believe the men at Camp Gordon could build a pike from Manchester to Beechgrove in 5 hours. . . . It is a quick job when Uncle Sam moves things."³⁰ Burr Rogers gave the hometown folk a taste of the daily routine for Battery D, 318th Field Artillery at Camp Jackson:

At 6:15 a.m. the bugle calls us to roll out of bed, and you can guess we roll, for we only have 5 minutes to get dressed and out for reveille. If we are late, we get extra duty and we all know what that means. After reveille we have 10 minutes physical drill. Then we rush back for breakfast as soon as we get a good wash. After breakfast we rush back to our squad rooms and after washing our dishes and making our beds, sweeping the floors and picking up all the match stems and cigarette butts on the grounds, we rush back to the stoves and try to get our fingers warm. The bugle sounds and out we go to the drill ground and take some more physical drill. Then we go to the stables and groom the horses and exercise them until 11:30, then rush back to the barracks for dinner. After all of our morning exercises, we make an impression on the mess sergeant. After dinner we read our mail, if we are fortunate to get any, and rest until 1:30 when we go

²⁹Ferrell, *Woodrow Wilson and World War I*, 19.

³⁰*Manchester Times*, 1 November 1917.

out again for gun and horse drill, which lasts until 4:30. Then we prepare for retreat—by shaving, polishing up our shoes and brushing our clothes. Then comes retreat at 5:15, and immediately after comes supper. We are free until 9, when the lights go out and we rest until another day.³¹

But more than just mundane Army routines caught the attention of these young men. J. O. Grooms of Company E, 144th Infantry at Camp Bowie, Texas, applauded his friends in Coffee County for organizing the Red Cross as “one of the greatest aids in the great victory for which we are all striving.” Grooms also lauded the American government as “one of the most enlightened that has ever been known,” and he reasoned that the United States necessarily retaliated against the vicious German brutality, yet out of obligation to France for its help during the Independence or Revolutionary War.³² These letters, as well as others, assured the hometown folk that by the end of the training the morale of their boys exuded confident patriotism.

The concerns of the men at camp varied considerably, but Private Freeze hid his thoughts in obscurity. During his brief stay at Camp Gordon and his half year at Camp Sevier, he sent no letters home. Perhaps his heart repelled the idea of fighting this foreign war, of leaving home from which he already was estranged, and of not coming back. By absence of correspondence, he left an impenetrable record, an unhappy mystery buried in the dust. But by late Spring 1918, with the situation of the Allies rapidly deteriorating on the Western Front, the United States

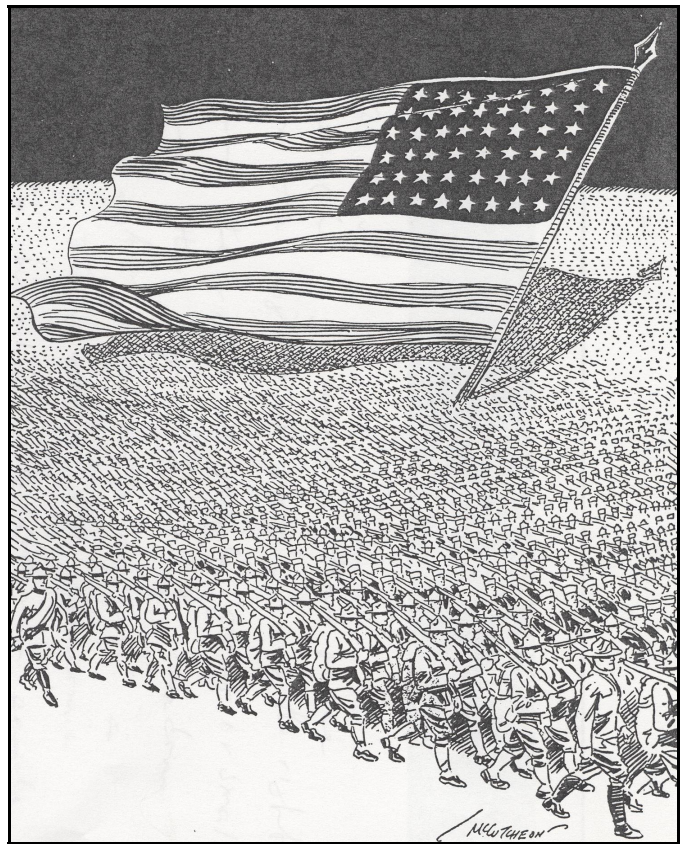
³¹*Manchester Times*, 31 January 1918. For a similar description of life in the camps, see Frank Freidel, *Over There: The Story of America's First Great Overseas Crusade* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1964), 15, 17, 19.

³²*Manchester Times*, 15 November 1917.

planned a full scale mobilization of troops across the Atlantic Ocean. Private Freeze and his companions in the 117th Infantry got ready to go.

The Army, however, faced the herculean task of moving over one million men and supplies, scattered across the United States, to points along the Western Front in northeastern France. With ample rail transport, mobilization of men and materiel to east coast ports in the United States theoretically offered no particular difficulty. But bottlenecks at railheads and at ports introduced incredible complications and headaches. And the emotions of the troops were put on edge by the experience.

Arthur Empey well described the ambiguity: “After spending several months of hard and intensive training in a cantonment, rumors that your outfit is to leave for the front will spring up over night like mushrooms. Each rumor will send a thrill of expectancy through you—life after all is worth living—you write a letter home saying ‘Goodbye’ and—the rumor fizzles out. After you have been fooled several times in this



“The Hope of Civilization” by John T. McCutcheon in the *Chicago Tribune*. Source: Hecht, *The War in Cartoons*, 75.

manner you become skeptical.”³³ Large groups of soldiers, queued up and waiting to board transport or just awaiting the arrival of transport became logistical problems. Soldiers flooded ports like Newport News (Virginia), New York City, Hoboken (New Jersey), and Montreal (Canada). But somehow the United States Navy with British assistance got the men “over there.”

Grave dangers stood in their way. Violent storms frequently wrecked ships that crossed the North Atlantic, and an accelerated German *U-Boot* campaign threatened American success. But the United States learned from British and French mistakes. Rather than send lone transport vessels across the open sea, the United States Navy developed a convoy system whereby warships escorted fleets of transport vessels safely across the Atlantic Ocean. This tactic proved remarkably effective, as conveyance losses tallied only a few hundred men out of roughly 2.5 million that were transported.³⁴

A large number ported at Brest, Bordeaux, Nantes, and St. Nazaire on the western coast of France.³⁵ Swells of American soldiers went ashore. In Brest, a German prisoner of war witnessed thousands of Americans disembarking. He asked his French guard about this, and when the guard told him more were coming the exasperated German cried out, “Mein Gott im

³³Arthur Guy Empey, *First Call: Guide Posts to Berlin* (New York, NY: Putnam’s, 1918), 111.

³⁴Douglas Welsh, *The USA in World War I* (New York, NY: Galahad, 1982), 16.

³⁵See Mark C. Carnes, John A. Garraty, and Patrick Williams, *Mapping America’s Past: A Historical Atlas* (New York, NY: Henry Holt, 1996), 164.

himmel!”³⁶ But others arrived in ports in England like the US 30th Division that served with the British Army from the time of its arrival in May 1918 until the Armistice. The 117th Infantry, an integral fighting component of the 59th Infantry Brigade and the 30th Division, was the structured military framework for Private Freeze and thousands more novice soldiers.

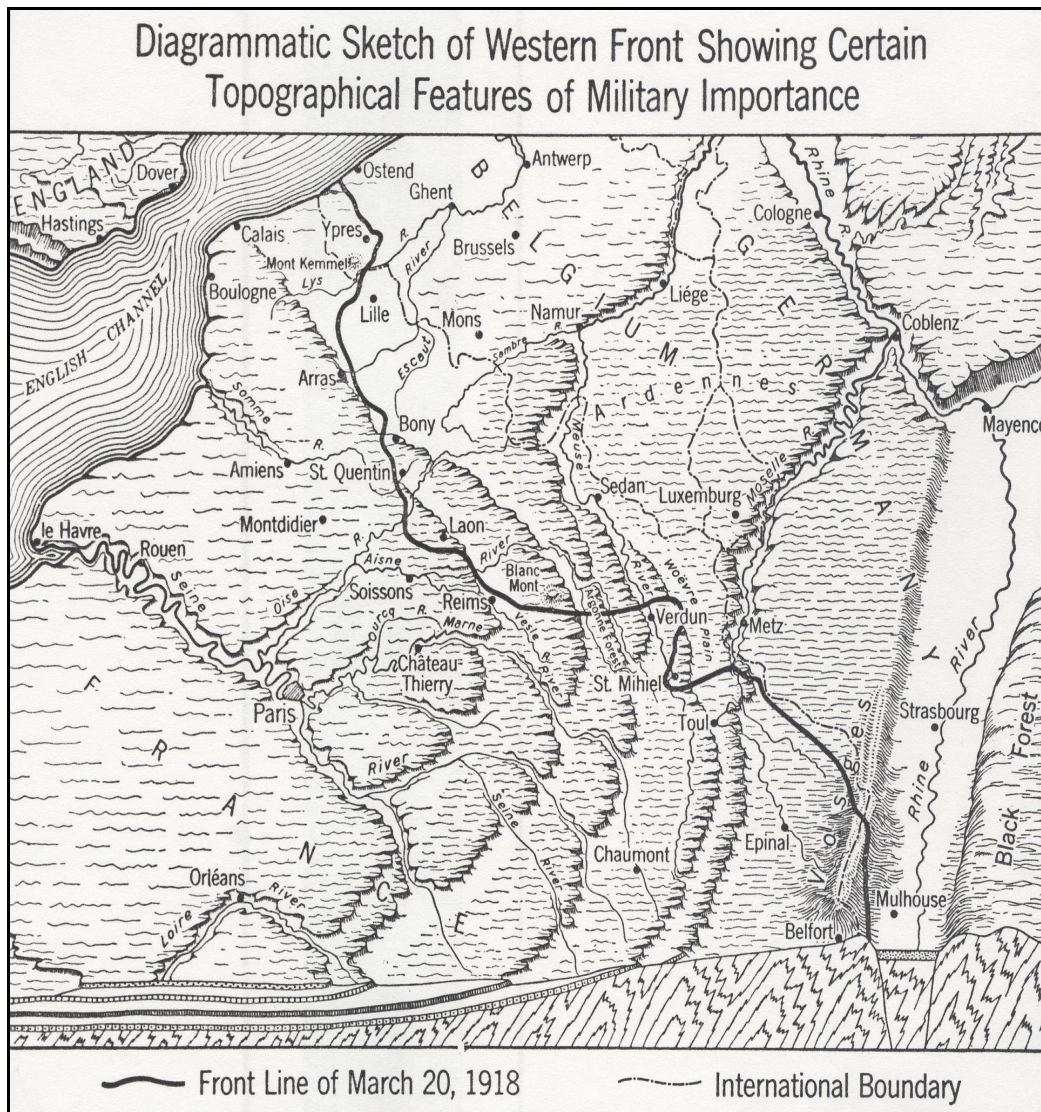
To the front and beyond. Freeze departed Camp Sevier with his infantry unit on May 1 for port in either New York City or Hoboken, New Jersey. He sailed on May 10 and arrived in England on May 20, some ten days later.³⁷ After a brief rest in Britain, division units crossed the English Channel with infantry going to Calais and the artillery going to Le Havre. Now joined to the British 39th Division and under administrative control of American II Corps, the 30th Division began training in Picardy and Flanders to make ready for movement to the nearby front.³⁸ The German offensive of Spring 1918 tried to divide the French from the British and push the latter back to the North Sea. The Germans succeeded to a great extent, and with an additional assault in June they threatened Paris. In despair, the French called in the Americans, who shored up the front, defended Belleau Wood near Chateau-Thierry, and forced the Germans into retreat. But

³⁶Source of quote is unknown.

³⁷*World War I Gold Star Records*, file for Lawrence Freeze: Coffee County. The 30th Division’s movement from Camp Sevier to England took about two months total. See *Order of Battle*, 163.

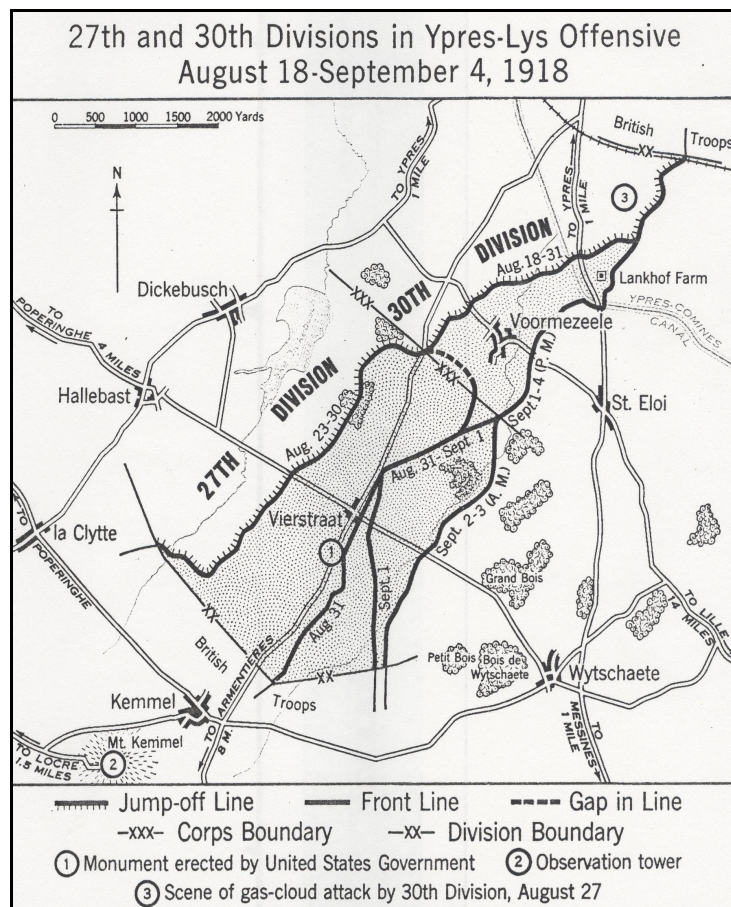
³⁸*Order of Battle*, 163. Once they were on the Continent, correspondence with folk at home came slowly, if at all. For two letters from 30th Division boys in France—Amzi Anthony, Company H, 119th Infantry, and Leighton Ewell, Battery E, 114th Field Artillery—see *Manchester Times*, 8 and 15 August 1918.

the Allied victory came at great human loss, and this continued as the Allies, now bolstered by the Americans, painstakingly recaptured northeastern France in bloody battles along a lengthy front that stretched from the English Channel to the Swiss Border.



Source: *American Armies and Battlefields in Europe* (Washington, D.C.: United States Army, Center of Military History, 1992), 4.

During this time, the 117th Infantry maneuvered in the Recques Training Area between Calais and St. Omer. On July 2, they moved west of Poperinghe, Belgium and assumed defense on July 9 of the East Poperinghe Line in the Dickebusch Lake and Scherpenberg Sectors. Here, the division took charge of the East Poperinghe trench system on July 11. For the rest of July, the division trained at the front line. On the nights of August 16 and 17, the 30th Division relieved the British 33rd Division in the Canal Sector from Elzenwalle to the rail junction just southeast of Transport Farm. From this position, with the US 27th Division on their right flank and the British 14th Division on their left, the 30th Division began the Ypres-Lys Operation.³⁹



Source: *American Armies and Battlefields in Europe*, 402.

³⁹*Order of Battle*, 165. American II Corps took command of this sector on August 28. *Records of the World War: Field Orders, 2d Army Corps* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1921), 13-14.

The report of a German withdrawal from the Lys salient sparked the operation. With the 60th Infantry Brigade leading, the Allies captured Moated Grange, Voormezeele, Lock No. 8, and Lanklof Farm. This advance secured the Ypres-Comines Canal just south of Ypres, gained the strategic high ground of Mt. Kemmel, and gave the Allies a strong northern flank from which they could drive the Germans further inland across the French-Belgian border.

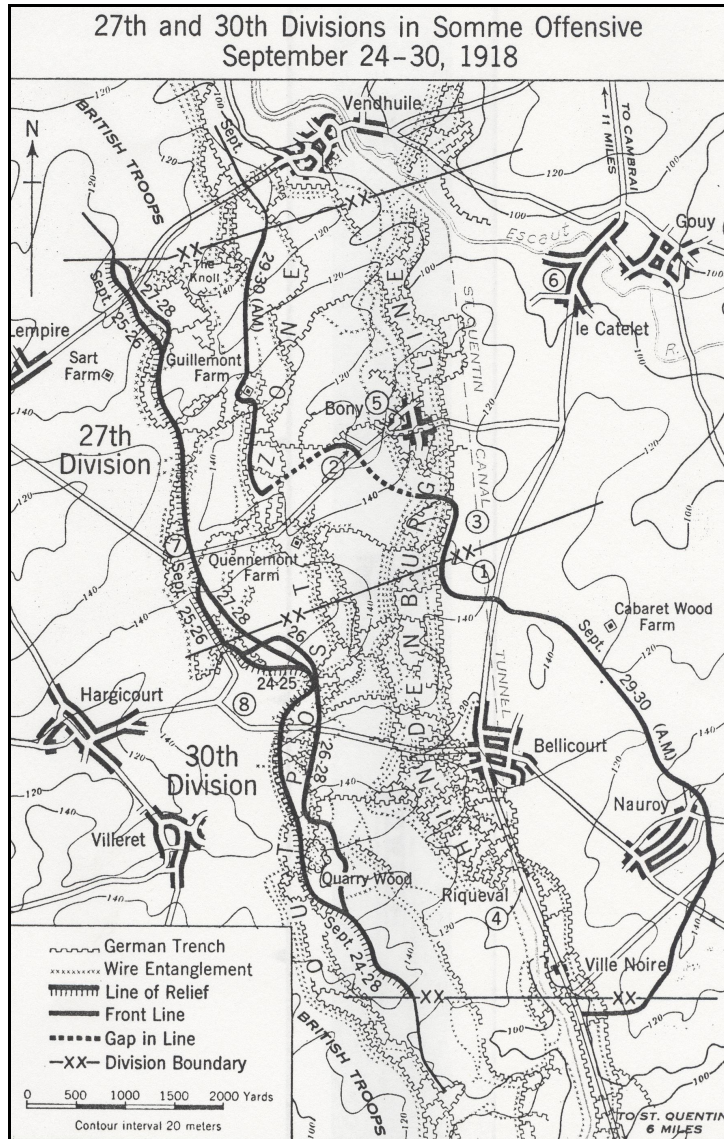
But the Americans encountered active resistance at Vierstraat and Voormezeele that cost the 30th Division about 800 soldiers and the 27th Division almost 1,300.⁴⁰ On the nights of September 3 and 4, the British 35th Division relieved the 30th Division of command. Private Freeze and his fellows from Coffee County had survived their first taste of battle. But things would be different for Freeze the next time.

From the front, Freeze accompanied his unit to Proven in the St. Pol Area, and then to the Puchevillers Area for training with the British Army.⁴¹ During the nights of September 21, 22, and 23, the 30th Division moved to the Tincourt-Boucly Area that was controlled by the British IV Army. Here just north of St. Quentin, American II Corps relieved Australian 1st Division and British 74th and 18th Divisions.⁴² On September 24, the 59th Infantry Brigade advanced to the forward area, and the 30th Division took command for the Somme offensive.

⁴⁰*American Armies and Battlefields in Europe* (Washington, DC: United States Army, Center of Military History, 1992), 404.

⁴¹Note the “secret” orders for this troop movement, *Records of the World War*, 17.

⁴²*Order of Battle*, 167.



Source: *American Armies and Battlefields in Europe*, 374.

“Old Hickory” (the celebrated name for 30th Division) positioned for a frontal attack against an impressive section of the Hindenburg Line.⁴³

The 27th Division stood ready on their left flank with a British IV Army artillery unit on their right.⁴⁴

On this section of the front the Germans made use of the St. Quentin Canal as the primary feature of their formidable Hindenburg Line. Between Bellicourt and a point about ½ mile north of Bony, where the channel passed through a tunnel, they took advantage of this spacious underground passage, which was deep enough below ground to be safe from the heaviest bombardment, to install barracks, storehouses and other accommodations for their troops. Large chambers

⁴³For detailed attack plans, see the Field Order dated 23 September and two more dated 24 September. *Records of the World War*, 19-28.

⁴⁴The American units depended on British artillery, since the 55th Field Artillery had been diverted to support the Meuse-Argonne operation. *Order of Battle*, 167.

dug in the tunnel walls were equipped as kitchens, offices, dressing stations and stables, while barges, stranded in the dry channel, were used as living quarters. The tunnel, nearly 4 miles long, was artificially ventilated, heated and electrically lighted; and there, close to the front line, the German troops lived safely and in comparative comfort.

From the tunnel below, underground passages led to the defenses above, which consisted of two separate trench systems. The principal one, the Hindenburg Line, was located in a zone about 1,000 yards wide immediately west of the tunnel. The other, located about a mile away, served as the outpost zone for the Hindenburg Line. These trench systems were connected with each other by numerous communicating trenches and both were protected by many bands of wire entanglements. All in all the defenses here in the autumn of 1918 were among the most formidable on the Western Front.⁴⁵

Part of a concerted assault in late September, the Allies hoped to break the German resistance here and at other key points along the front.

When the 30th Division went into the front lines, German artillery bombarded the area heavily. The Germans apparently sought to preempt the Allied attack that typically followed the change of troops in the front lines.⁴⁶ This barrage, along with a German raid that the Americans repelled, produced some casualties. Among those killed in action of September 25 was Private Freeze.⁴⁷ As a result, he did not see the difficult Allied advance, the breaking of the Hindenburg Line, the capture of Bellicourt and the St. Quentin Canal Tunnel, nor the taking of German

⁴⁵*American Armies and Battlefields*, 373. For similar descriptions, compare Laurence Stallings, *The Doughboys: The Story of the AEF, 1917-1918* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1963), 261-262; also Shipley Thomas, *The History of the A. E. F.* (New York, NY: Doran, 1920), 267-268.

⁴⁶For a vivid description, see Empey, 257ff.

⁴⁷This occurred prior to the actual offensive that began on September 29. See Thomas, *History of the A. E. F.*, 269.

prisoners.⁴⁸ Freeze also reaped no personal benefit from the notable heroics that made “Old Hickory” the “division that wore more Medals of Honor than any other.”⁴⁹ On the contrary, Freeze and others sacrificed their lives and thereby created opportunities for individual and unit success. They absorbed the enemy aggression that others were spared. But for Private Freeze, the war had ended. He had “gone west.”⁵⁰

Memories. The bodies of those killed in action received the greatest care, not only out of respect for the dead but also for the tally of casualties, for notification of unit commanders, local authorities, and relatives in the United States, and also for sanitary reasons.⁵¹

As for Freeze, he lies buried in the Somme American Cemetery near Bony,



Chapel at Somme American Cemetery near Bony, France.
Source: *American Armies and Battlefields in Europe*, 388.

⁴⁸The military gains of Allied offensives in September 1918 greatly exceeded expectations, and lives lost amounted to relatively less than previous campaigns. James E. Edmonds, *A Short History of World War I* (London, UK: Oxford, 1951), 360-361.

⁴⁹Stallings, *Doughboys*, 265. Army historian S. L. A. Marshall lauded the 30th Division as “the finest infantry division in the European Theater” for their exceptional performance, repeated citations, and minimal casualties.

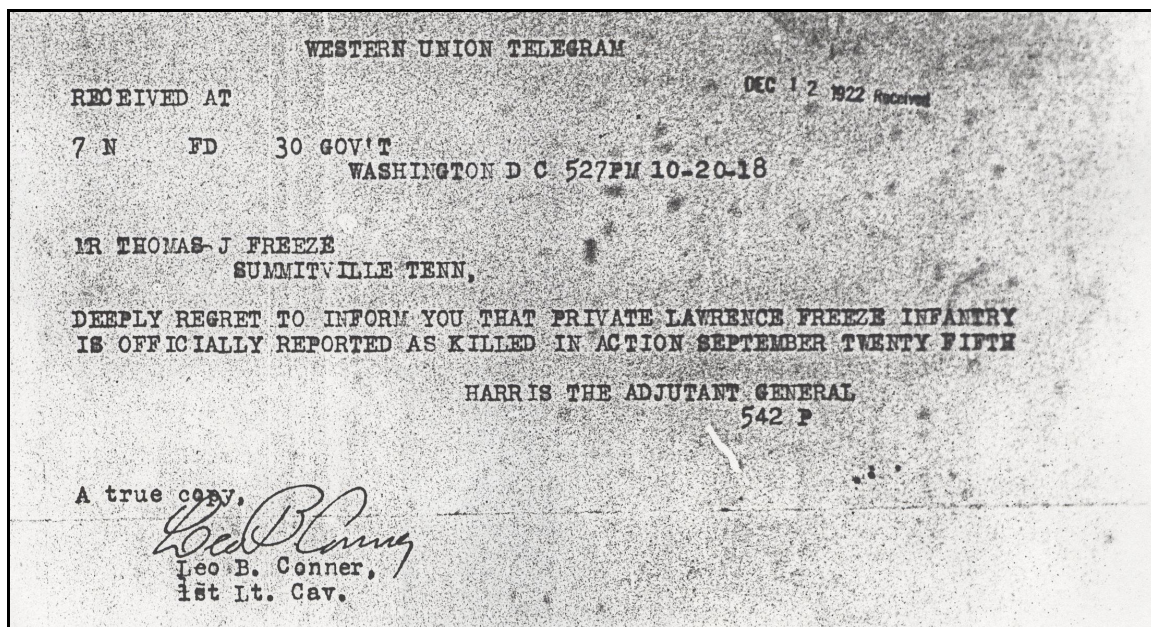
⁵⁰This was a euphemism for the death of a soldier on the front. Empey, *First Call*, 300.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 300ff.

David W Fletcher, Annual Phi Alpha Theta Regional History Conference, University of Tennessee, March 2001, Revised January 2015

All Rights Reserved / Unauthorized Electronic Publishing Prohibited / www.davidwfletcher.com

France some ninety-eight miles northeast of Paris. This fourteen-acre resting place for 1,844 American veterans of the Great War also entombs 137 unknown soldiers and honors 333 missing combatants whose names are inscribed on the interior walls of the Chapel-Memorial.⁵² Across the Atlantic Ocean, another memorial is located next to the county courthouse in Manchester, Tennessee. This World War I Monument pays tribute to the thirty-six soldiers from Coffee County, including Private Freeze, who gave their lives in service to their country.⁵³



⁵² *American Memorials and Overseas Military Cemeteries* (Washington, DC: American Battle Monuments Commission, 1989), 5.

⁵³ Causes of death included pneumonia, accidental drowning, the sinking of the *Otranto*, internal hemorrhage from a gunshot wound, influenza, wounds received in action, cerebral spinal meningitis, and killed in action. *World War Record of Ex-Soldiers of Coffee County*, 62-67, 74-75, 77.

Conclusion. Back home, authorities from Washington dispatched a telegram (see above) to report the death of Private Freeze.⁵⁴ A letter of condolence that applauded Private Freeze's "brave sacrifice" for "Freedom's Holy Cause" also came to Thomas Freeze from W. S. Myer, the United States Fuel Administrator for Tennessee.⁵⁵ Without any fanfare, as befits the simple life



The grave of PVT Lawrence E. Freeze in Bony, France. Source: Personal collection of David W Fletcher, Manchester, TN.

of a rural Tennessee farmer, the memory of Lawrence Freeze faded away. Lawrence had departed his dad, his family, and friends in Summitville on September 23, 1917. Over the course of the brief year that followed, he became a soldier, deployed to Europe, and rendered the ultimate sacrifice in the cause for freedom. Over 100,000 more young American men did the same.

By the time of the 1920 Census, Thomas Freeze's family had changed considerably. Thomas lost his wife, his firstborn son, a step-daughter, and a daughter. But the tough farmer acquired a new wife and additional sons and daughters.⁵⁶ For the Freezes of Summitville, Tennessee, life went on.

⁵⁴*World War I Gold Star Records*, file for Lawrence Freeze: Coffee County.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*

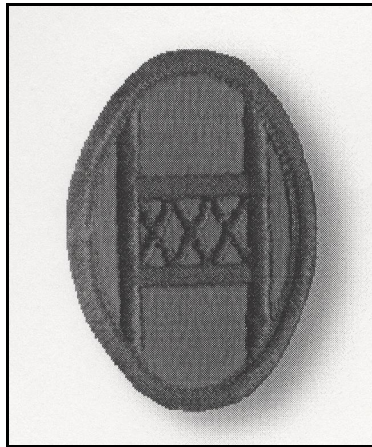
⁵⁶Smith, *The John Rufus Freeze Family*, 5-6.

FACTS ABOUT THE 30TH DIVISION⁵⁷

The 30th Division was organized at Camp Sevier, South Carolina, from the old Ninth National Guard (of Tennessee, North and South Carolina) and was augmented by men drawn from North and South Carolina, Tennessee, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, and North Dakota. The divisional insignia is a monogram in blue of the letters "O. H." standing for Old Hickory, the nickname of Andrew Jackson. The crossbar of the "H" contains a triple "X," the Roman numerals for thirty. The whole is on a maroon background.

Major General George W. Read commanded the division from April 27, 1918 to August 10, 1918 when he assumed command of the Second U.S. Army Corps, and command of the division passed to General Edward M. Lewis who retained command until the armistice. The overseas movement began on May 7, 1918, and the last units landed at Calais, France on June 24, 1918.

The 30th Division suffered a total of 11,081 battle casualties with 1,652 killed in combat and six officers and seventy-one enlisted taken prisoner by the Germans. The division received 2,384 replacements; it captured from the enemy 3,848 prisoners and 81 pieces of artillery; it made a total forward advance of 29 ½ kilometers (18 ½ miles) against enemy resistance.



30th Division Patch - Old Hickory

The following organizations composed the 30th Division:

- 59th Infantry Brigade, 117th and 118th Regiments
- 60th Infantry Brigade, 119th and 120th Regiments
- 113th, 114th, and 115th Machine Gun Battalions
- 53rd Artillery Brigade, 113th, 114th, and 115th Artillery Regiments
- 105th Trench Mortar Battery
- 105th Engineer Regiment and Train
- 105th Field Signal Battalion
- 105th Train Headquarters and Military Police
- 105th Supply Train
- 105th Ammunition Train
- 105th Sanitary Train, 117th, 118th, 119th, and 120th Ambulance Companies and Field Hospitals

⁵⁷Thomas, *History of the A. E. F.*, 462-463.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Empey, Arthur Guy. *First Call: Guide Posts to Berlin*. New York, NY: Putnam's Sons, 1918.

Freeze, PVT Lawrence Edward. Postcard photograph in military uniform, n.d. Personal collection, Martha Swanger, Manchester, TN.

Freeze, PVT Lawrence Edward. Photograph of grave headstone at Somme American Cemetery, Bony, France, 1993. Personal collection, David W Fletcher, Manchester, TN.

Hecht, George J., ed. *The War in Cartoons*. New York, NY: Garland, 1971.

Records of the World War: Field Orders, 2d Army Corps. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1921.

Twelfth Census of Population, 1900: Tennessee, Coffee County. Washington, DC: Bureau of the Census Microfilm Laboratory, 1978.

World War I Gold Star Records. File of Lawrence Freeze: Coffee County. Nashville, TN: Tennessee State Library and Archives, 1979. Microform.

Secondary Sources

American Armies and Battlefields in Europe. Washington, DC: United States Army, Center of Military History, 1992.

American Memorials and Overseas Military Cemeteries. Washington, DC: American Battle Monuments Commission, 1989.

Bradley, Michael R. "World War I and Normalcy." Lecture notes from United States History II. Lynchburg, TN: Motlow State Community College, 14 July 1999.

Breen, William J. *Uncle Sam At Home: Civilian Mobilization, Wartime Federalism, and the Council of National Defense, 1917-1919*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1984.

Carnes, Mark C., John A. Garraty, and Patrick Williams. *Mapping America's Past: A Historical Atlas*. New York, NY: Henry Holt, 1996.

David W Fletcher, Annual Phi Alpha Theta Regional History Conference, University of Tennessee, March 2001, Revised January 2015
All Rights Reserved / Unauthorized Electronic Publishing Prohibited / www.davidwfletcher.com

Edmonds, James E. *A Short History of World War I*. London, UK: Oxford, 1951.

Ferrell, Robert H. *Woodrow Wilson and World War I: 1917-1921*. New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1985.

Ferrell, Robert H., and Richard Natkiel. *Atlas of American History*. New York, NY: Facts on File, 1993.

Freidel, Frank. *Over There: The Story of America's First Great Overseas Crusade*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1964.

Order of Battle of the United States Land Forces in the World War: American Expeditionary Forces, Divisions. Compiled by Historical Section, Army War College. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1931.

Service Record Book of Men and Women of Manchester, Tennessee and Community. Manchester, TN: V. F. W. Post No. 5031, n.d.

Smith, Christine. *The John Rufus Freeze Family: A Genealogy of the Freeze Family from Coffee County, Tennessee*. Manchester, TN: Mrs. Lyndon Smith, 1992.

Stallings, Laurence. *The Doughboys: The Story of the AEF, 1917-1918*. New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1963.

Thomas, Shipley. *The History of the A. E. F.* New York, NY: Doran, 1920.

Welch, Douglas. *The USA in World War I*. New York, NY: Galahad, 1982.

Wolfe, Margaret. "World War I." *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, edited by Carroll Van West. Nashville, TN: Rutledge Hill, 1998.

World War Record of Ex-Soldiers of Coffee County, State of Tennessee. Compiled by Mrs. Rutledge Smith and Tennessee American Legion Auxiliary. Nashville, TN: Tennessee State Library and Archives, 1933-1935. Microform.

Woods, William S. *Colossal Blunders of the War*. New York, NY: Macmillan, 1930.

Wright, Louis B. *South Carolina: A Bicentennial History*. New York, NY: Norton, 1976.