

Program for 28 May 2016 - Marvin Wicks

Welcoming words: Thanks for joining us as we honor those from the Harmony area that gave their lives for this country.

Brief comments about this location, the Harmony Historical Society has a work and display area across the hall, this room is a conference room for several organization and we have permission to display items from our collection here. The Gausta exhibit on the back wall and this exhibit are both considered to be permanent exhibits.

I want to thank the Harmony American legion for funding this display; the members of the Harmony Historical Society for their support in creating this display; a thank you to Kiera Olson who will be closing the program for us today, and also the ladies of the Historical Society for providing food that we can enjoy while we take time to visit after the program.

On the table to my right are three books that will remain a part of the display; the book published by the Harmony Legion after WW 2, has information about service members from WW 1 and 2, including photos.

The second book is a collection of over 1400 letters written to the Fillmore County Republican newspaper by servicemen during WW 2. This collection was given to the Historical Society and we have indexed it so it is now searchable by last name. In 1973 the Army and Air Force Records center burned and between 16 and 18 million records were lost so collections such as this may be the only source to determine where and when an individual served.

The third book, Boots and Badges is a recent publication put out by the Fillmore County Journal and is an excellent source of information about service members from Fillmore County.

Unveiling by Legion Commander and HAHS President. Explanation of the display: MAW Point out items in the display.

When David's father brought these items to the Historical Society, as with most items we receive, we evaluate the material on how best it can be stored. These items remained on the table for several weeks and the longer we looked, it became apparent that they did not belong in a box. Memorial Day is the day when we officially recognize those that lost their lives in the uniform of our country and we decided this would make an appropriate display, and at an appropriate time, to serve as a reminder to our community and to the many visitors from around the world that come into this room that Freedom is not free.

On my right is a Gold Star Service Banner to honor all that died while in the military service. The Blue Star Banner originated in 1917 and during WW 2 many homes had the Blue Star Banner displayed in the window to indicate a family member was in the military service, many of those Blue Stars turned to gold. Recently there is move to add a Silver Star Banner to recognize those discharged from service because of wounds or those declared as invalids as a result of injuries in a war zone.

To the left is the plaque listing the names of Harmony area men killed in combat.

I have collected information from several sources available giving details about the Units and battles these men fought. Many survivors of these battles have recorded their experiences and most are far worse than we can comprehend. I cannot say that the person named was in the same battle described but they would have been in the same unit.

Speaking generally about WW 1, known then as the Great War, lasted from July 1914 to Nov 11 1918, but America did not officially enter the war until April of 1917, it was not until mid-1918 that American troops were on the front lines. Six Harmony area men were killed in five months of fighting, from July to November 11, 1918. The Armistice Day.

Bennie Pederson was killed on 10 November, one day before the fighting stopped.

The pictures on the east wall show the men from Fillmore County in the first and second call for the Great War. There were at least eight calls and perhaps more.

WWI

1. Gustav Berg, United States Marine Corp

Son of Gunder and Gunhild (Julia) Berg.

Gustav was born 19 March, 1893 in Minnesota

He was killed in action on July 19, 1918 at the Battle of Soissons at the age of 25.

One part of the battle was to cut a main road between Soissons and Paris which ran along a ravine with a nasty brush tangled stream, fortified with gun emplacements, machine gun nests and wire entanglements. The battle lasted 4 days, July 18th to July 22nd, the first call to battle was “fix bayonets” and the fighting began. When the unit reassembled on the 4th day, the brutal cost of the battle became apparent, men were exhausted, Battalions looked like companies, Companies looked like squads. Some companies were commanded by corporals or privates. In this 4 day battle there were 107,000 Allied casualties of which 12,000 were American, and the Germans suffered 168,000 casualties. A 4 day battle.

This was the first battle for the Americans in the war and Historians state that the Soissons attack of July 18 and 19 turned the tide of the war. Never again in WW 1 would the German Army mount an offensive battle.

2. Ole Scrabeck, United States Army

Son of Samuel and Maggie Scrabeck.

Ole was born in 22 December 1889_ and lived in Bristol Twp.

He was killed in action on the 29th of September 1918 at the age of 28 years.

The Somme Sector battle was to break through the Hindenberg/ Siegfried line, a very fortified German line 4 miles long that was the backbone of the German defenses. Those men faced trenches that had been in place for more than two years.

A main assault was launched on September 29, in thick foggy conditions. This was the day that Ole Scrabeck was killed. The Division faced a very determined German defense near Bony France, by the end of that day; the backbone of the Hindenburg line was broken. For the 107th American Regiment this was the bloodiest day of any American Regiment in WW I,

3. Steen Soum United States Army

Son of Steen and Augusta Soum

Steen was born in Norway in Jan. 1887 and came to Harmony Twp. in 1893.

He registered for the military service in 1917 in Montana.

He was killed in combat on the 29th of September, 1918, at the age of 31.

On September 26-27 The 362nd Infantry was just south of Epinonville, France, Dusk finally came on Hell's Hill, night time was not pleasant as with darkness the Germans commenced firing and lobbing gas shells that called for the gas mask. One high explosive shell hit the shell-hole in which the five officers of Company C were huddled. All of them were badly wounded.

"The 29th of September, the day Steen was killed, will always be surging back in the minds of men of the 362nd Infantry. Its scenes and deeds, time can never erase so long as memory lasts".

4. Walter Johnson

Son of Charles and Isabelle Johnson

He was born in 8 June, 1891 in Harmony Twp.

He was killed in combat on 17 October, 1918 in France at the age of 27.

He was killed in a continuation of the same battle where Steen Soum lost his life. The effort of this battle on the day Walter was killed was to cut a major supply line supporting the German forces.

5. Bennie Pederson

Son of Ole O & Sophia Pederson

Bennie was born 10 Aug 1894 in Fremont Twp.

He registered for the draft at Decorah, Iowa on 3 Jun, 1917

He was killed in action November 10th, 1918 near Metz, France

In a letter to his sister dated November 9th he states that had been up to the front lines and it was rather exciting out in "No Man's Land". I suppose you are busy picking corn.

He was killed a little after 8 PM on the following evening, November 10th.

A fellow soldier reported that the platoon was trying to capture machine guns that were giving them trouble and as they entered a wooded area he was hit and died almost instantly. There were several of our boys killed that night but the Germans paid for it dearly.

6. Edward J Larson

I was unable to locate his parents.

In 1910, Edward age 20 and a sister, Sena, age 21 were living with Karl Evjen, an uncle, in Preble Twp. Fillmore Co.

He was born 22 Nov. 1891 at Volga. South Dakota

He registered for the draft, 5 June, 1917, at Preston, Minnesota

He was killed in October, 1918 at the age of 27, in Flanders Fields.

WW 2 All of the WW 2 Harmony men were killed in invasion forces.

7. Arland O Casterton

Son of Ogdon and Lillian (Russell) Casterton

He was born in Canton Twp. Fillmore Co. March, 1923

Enlisted on 23 October, 1943 in the Army.

He was killed in action July 17, 1944 when he was 21 years old

He landed on Omaha beach on 15 June, 1944, 9 days after the D Day invasion. His unit, the 117th infantry, entered combat and moved about 16 miles inland from Omaha beach to the area near St. Lo. Normandy. Then on the 15th of July the unit was relieved from combat for rest and recuperation while they waited for supplies and the preparation for a major break out against the enemy was planned to start on 25 July. Even though they were relieved from combat they remained under frequent shelling. He was killed on 17 July with burial at a Saint Lo cemetery and the body was later returned to the Elliota cemetery.

If you were to judge that invasion in connection with the planning, it was a total failure; fortunately we can judge it today as a great success because of the heroic action of the men that landed on those beaches. For days after the invasion the sea lanes were blocked by sunken ships and debris so supplies could not be unloaded, even ammunition became rationed for men fighting on the front lines until sufficient supplies arrived.

8. LuVerne Soland

Son of Guy and Nora (Sanden) Soland

He was born January 23, 1920, and graduated from Harmony High School in 1939
On January 14, 1942 he was inducted into the Army at Ft. Snelling.

On November 8, 1942 at the age of 22 he was killed on the 2nd day of the invasion of North Africa.

Burial was in the U. S. Military Cemetery at Kasha Mehdiya, in French Morocco. In 1948 his remains were returned and buried in the Henrytown Cemetery.

The first American offensive action of WW 2 was when the 60th Infantry spearheaded the invasion of French Morocco. The American forces sailing from U S port joined with Britch Forces for the invasion. The 2nd Btn arrived later than planned giving the Vichy French time to organize so they were strafed by enemy planes during the landing. E Company was stopped completely at a strong point, the Port Lyautey lighthouse.

9. Wendell Crowell

Son of Frank and Evelyn Hunt Crowell, of Granger.

Born on 1 June 1917

Served in the U.S. Marine Corp

He was killed on June 7, 1945 at the age of 28 on the Island of Okinawa.

He left a wife, Linda and a son Clifford, to mourn his loss.

On April 1, 1945 an American force larger than was sent into Normandy, launched an invasion of the island of Okinawa, the final effort prior to the invasion of Japan proper. . The 82-day-long battle lasted until the 22nd of June 1945. The battle was known as the “typhoon of steal” because of the ferocity of

the battle and the intensity of the kamikaze attacks. The severity of the campaign, along with the many civilians fighting, resulted in more deaths than the combined total killed in Hiroshima and Nagasaki from the atomic bombs.

Vietnam

10. Sergeant David Michel

Son of George and Delores Michel

He was born on April 29, 1947

And was killed in action in Vietnam on June 11th in 1969.

The family has given us a letter written by a Thomas Lynch to David parents and a copy of the original letter is part of the display. I ask each of you to listen closely to the words in this letter. Think of the how difficult it was for this young man to write this letter and also think of the obligation he felt to tell the family what David had done. Thank you Thomas Lynch where ever you are.

Cliff will read the Thomas Lynch letter.

After reading the letter I ask **all that are able please stand for a final tribute.**

Thomas Lynch letter to Sgt. David Michel's parents:

Dear Mr. & Mrs. Michel

My name is Tom Lynch. I don't know if you remember me but I stopped to see your family in July of 1969.

Your brave heroic son, Dave, lives in my memories and prayers every day. I have wanted to stop and see you many times, not wanting to stir up your memories has been my excuse.

When the grenade landed in our bunker, I yelled Jump. A corporal and I jumped out; he made sure we made it out. He had the courage to make sure we made it.

There is no way I could ever be able to repay you, or especially Dave. This is where I learned the true meaning of comradery and brotherhood.

*My love and prayers are with you always wherever you are.
Respectfully yours forever, Thomas E. Lynch*

Kiera Olson to sound taps.

This concludes our program