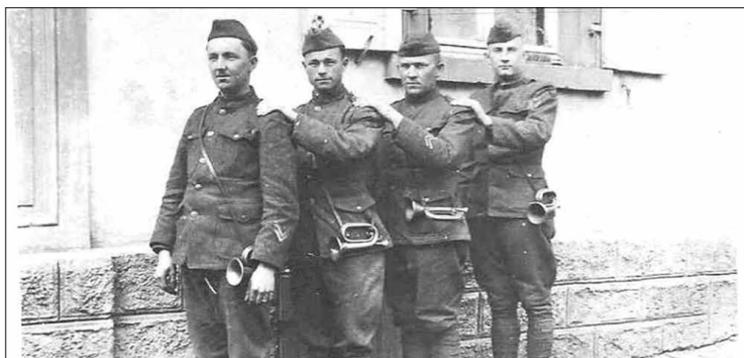


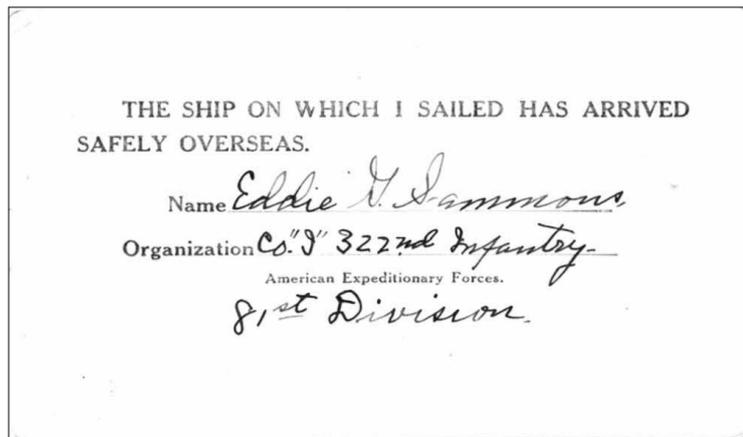
Cartoon of French box cars on the railroad used during the war



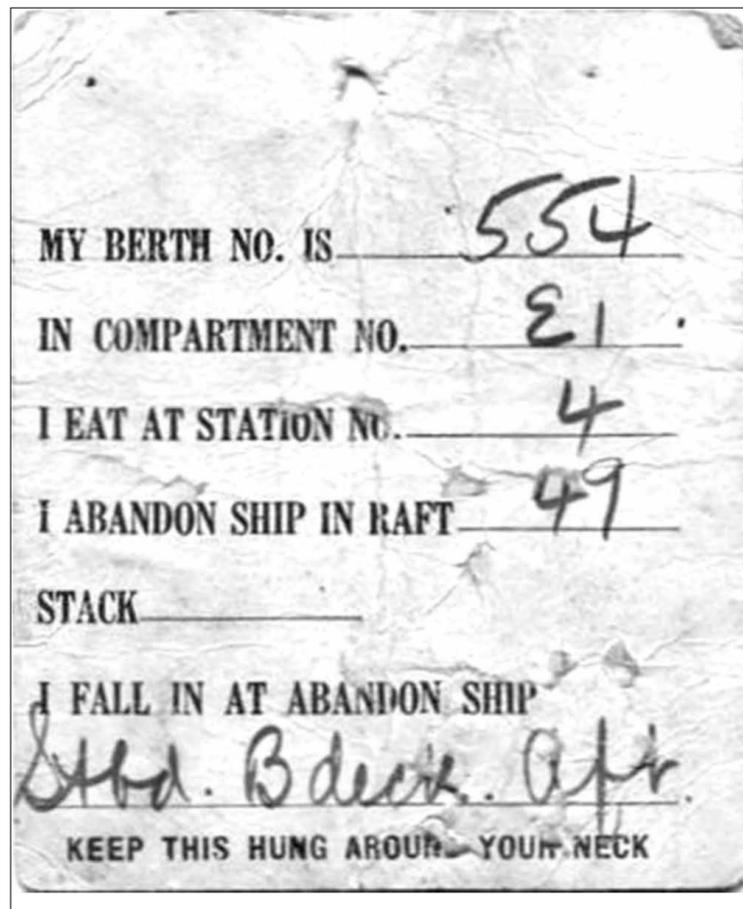
Trench bugle, common in World War I



A photograph of World War I buglers



A Red Cross postcard they could send to family when they arrived safely



Actual ship bunk and meal assignment ticket worn around the neck

The World War I profile of Bugler William Ralph Smith

By NORMA ECKARD
SPECIAL TO THE BEACON

William Ralph Smith was born and raised in Johnston County. His brother, Robert F. Smith, also served in World War I.

Sometime between the 1900 Census and the 1910 Census, his mother passed away. The 1910 Census lists William and all of his brothers and sisters as laborers on the family farm in Johnston County.

William's World War I draft registration (June 5, 1917) shows he was living in Johnston County, single, and working as a barber. He also reported that he had experience in the North Carolina Militia, 2nd Regiment, for six months.

On Aug. 25, 1917, his father, Britton Smith, was appointed U.S. Postmaster of Bolivia in Brunswick County (Source: ancestry.com). The Smithfield Herald, Sept. 14, 1917, p. 7, noted: "Mr. Britton Smith of Bolivia was in town Sunday and Monday. Mr. Smith has been appointed Postmaster of Bolivia and expects to move his family down there soon."

By the time William was ordered to report for military duty and was inducted Sept. 21, 1917, his residence was Bolivia. He became a bugler with Machine Gun Company, 322nd Infantry, 81st "Wildcat" Division.

The bugler had a hazardous position. Telephone and telegraph lines were useless when trenches were abandoned, so the bugle became an important method of communication. To sound the bugle, the bugler's gas mask was removed, risking poisoning and death during gas attacks.

In addition to the standard reveille and taps calls, the bugler blurted out command signals for the troops during action. To do so required him to stand tall and play the instrument with great force so all could hear over the rattling of machine guns and the explosions of artillery shells. He was a strategic target for the

enemy. Cutting off lines of communication in war was an essential objective for the enemy (Source: The American Legion, August 15, 2013).

The 81st Division completed training at Camp Sevier, S.C., and began the train trip to New York City, boarding the ships July 31, 1918. Bugler Smith's ship was Orduña (Source: ancestry.com). Refer to the photo of an actual troop transport ship bunk and meal assignment ticket, to be worn around the neck, during a trip across the Atlantic Ocean.

Sunday, Aug. 11, 1918: As our ship sailed into the docks of Liverpool, our band played "Britain Forever" and a big English cruiser sailed by us playing "The Yanks are Coming," which showed us that we had a hearty welcome. Old men, women, and children greeted us by saying, "God Bless you, Sammy!" and young girls hugged and kissed us and walked with us most of the five miles that we hiked out to the rest camp called Knotty Ashe (Thomas Shinn's diary).

In England, the Red Cross provided postcards to send to loved ones, notifying them of their safe arrival in Europe.

A week later, they crossed the Channel and arrived in France. They were loaded into the infamous French boxcars marked "Hommes 40 Chevaux 8" (40 men or 8 horses). Most diaries and unit documentation write of the difficulty traveling this way although they quickly point out they prefer it to marching! This cartoon was found illustrating the experience. Women did the work at the railroad, breaking, switching and even track work.

Wednesday, Aug. 21, 1918: Arrived St. Percy after marching through Flogny. We were the first American soldiers that these people had ever seen and they thought we were all millionaires because we had watches and rings and other things that peasants in France didn't have (Thomas Shinn's diary).

Arriving at St. Die near the

end of September, they were to relieve the 92nd "Buffalo Soldiers" Division.

The 92nd Division included two Brunswick County men, William James Gordon and Robert Bollie Stanley, as well as several other soldiers listed on the World War I Army/Marine Division Rosters.

After darkness fell Sept. 19, they moved into the trenches the Buffalo Soldiers had vacated.

On Sept. 22, after a German airplane flew directly above their heads, a sign appeared in no-man's-land from the Germans, proving that their movements were being closely monitored: "Good-bye Buffalo's, Welcome Wild Cats."

On Oct. 15, 1918, at 9 p.m., they were relieved from their position in the trenches. Bugler Smith was wounded that day. His North Carolina World War I Service Card showed it was a slight wound, but it was a gunshot wound to the elbow, as indicated on the passenger list, and he was classified as having a disability at discharge. According to unit history, 14 men were wounded and 21 were killed during the occupation of the St. Die sector.

William Ralph Smith returned to the United States on Jan. 31, 1919, and was honorably discharged Feb. 22, 1919, with a 15 percent disability.

The 1920 Census shows Smith was living with his father and two sisters in Town Creek. His father was still postmaster and his sister, Patsy, was assistant postmaster. Smith was working as a barber. He married in 1922 and eventually moved to Wilmington and became a watchmaker. He and his wife raised several children.

In 1929, William's younger brother Robert, who also served in World War I, died of meningitis and tuberculosis. He was only 35 and never married.

In 1936, his father Britton Smith died. The State Port Pilot, March 18, 1936, p. 6, published his obituary:

Funeral Services for Bolivia Man

Mr. Britton Smith, long-time resident and businessman of Bolivia, died Thursday morning at James Walker Memorial hospital, after a lingering illness of pneumonia. Mr. Smith was 75 years of age. He was a native of Smithfield, Johnston County.

Being an honest, straightforward Christian man, he was greatly loved and highly esteemed among all of his friends and acquaintances.

His wife preceded him in death several years ago. He leaves to mourn the loss of three daughters, Mrs. Stancil of Johnston County; Mrs. Fred Edwards of Bolivia; and Mrs. Thelma Pittman of Wilmington; also a son Ralph Smith of Wilmington, and several grandchildren.

The funeral was conducted at 11:00 o'clock Friday at Smithfield by Rev. B.R. Page, assisted by local pastors.

William Ralph Smith passed away in 1971 at 80. He was laid to rest in Oakdale Cemetery in Wilmington. Military honors are shown.

Sources: Johnson, Clarence Walton (1919) The History of the 321st Infantry, with a brief historical sketch of the 80th division, being a vivid and authentic account of the life and experience of American soldiers in France, while they trained, worked, and fought to help win the world war, Columbia, S.C., The R. L. Bryan Co.; Thomas P. Shinn's Wartime Diary

If you would like to help us honor Brunswick County World War I veterans, go to caswellriflerange.com or email fcaswellriflerange@gmail.com. Three hundred fifty Brunswick County World War I veterans have been honored to date.

Another roll calling event will be Saturday, April 6, at the rifle range starting at 11 a.m. The yearly fundraiser will be Saturday, May 4.

A monument was placed at the site of the rifle range in Caswell Beach Veterans'

Day 2018 in honor of the men and women from Brunswick County who served their country. A book, "To All Those Who Served in World War I from Brunswick County, N.C.," is to be published this year containing all 724 names, as well as a historical overview of the 1918 World War I Rifle Range Target Pit Storage Room.

We would like the public to review the names of the following Brunswick County men who died during World War I to make certain they have not forgotten anyone who may have perished or missed someone while researching names that should be on this list.

Killed in action: Pvts. 1st Class Walter S. Brock and

Erastus I. Nelson, Pvts. Harvey T. Chadwick, Jimmie Griffin and Harry L. Pigott, Cpl. Herbert B. Ward

Died of wounds: Pvts. William C. Hewett and Benjamin B. Smith

Died of disease: Pvts. William F. Brooks, Carl J. Danford, Manning Hall, Claudie H. McCall, Elijah Milliken, Kendrick W. Outlaw, Cecil S. Pierce, Samuel C. Swain, Guy E. Watson, David Williams and Fred Wilson, Pvt. 1st Class John W. Carlisle, David L. Doshier (cook), Seaman James C. Edwards, Sgt. Robert G. Farmer

Norma Eckard of Caswell Beach is president of Friends of Fort Caswell Rifle Range Inc.

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