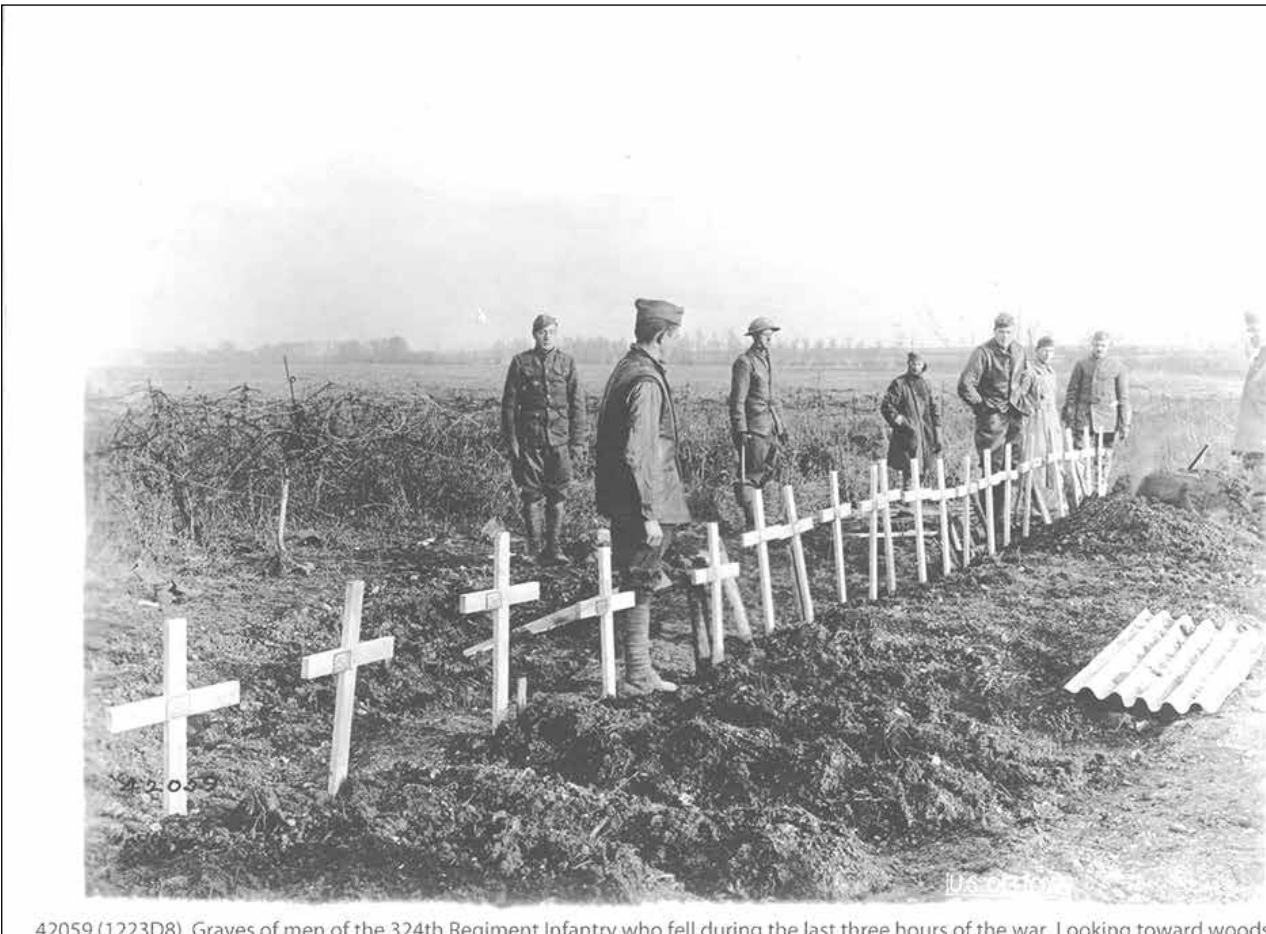




This image of Robert Eugene Robbins was contributed by his granddaughter, Joyce Crabtree.



42059 (1223D8). Graves of men of the 324th Regiment Infantry who fell during the last three hours of the war. Looking toward woods which the enemy held when the armistice went into effect. Manheulles, Meuse, France. November 13, 1918.

Graves of men of the 324th Regiment infantry, Nov. 13, 1918

The World War I profile of Pvt. Robert Eugene Robbins

By NORMA ECKARD
SPECIAL TO THE BEACON

Robert Eugene Robbins was born in Brunswick County. A partial family tree is in FamilySearch.org. Robert's mother died in 1910 when he was 15 and his father died in 1914 when he was 19. Sometime between 1910 and 1917, when he registered for the draft, he moved to Rich Square for work. His draft registration shows he was living there single, supporting a sister and working as a railroader.

Robbins was ordered to report for military duty April 20, 1918. He was inducted April 26, 1918, and began training at Camp Jackson, S.C. He was initially assigned to the 534th Engineers, but June 24, 1918, he was transferred to Company G, 324th Infantry, 81st "Wildcat" Division, which was training at Camp Sevier, S.C.

The 324th Infantry left the U.S. on Aug. 5, 1918, several days after the 321st and 322nd.

Previous columns describe the events in France including the orders to go "over the top" during the final days of the war. Pvt. Robbins' 2nd Battalion (Companies E-H) took the position on the far right the morning of Nov. 9.

The Armistice was signed Nov. 11, 1918. However, because the 81st Division did not receive confirmation of the signing, another attack was planned the night of Nov. 10 and executed Nov. 11.

At 5 a.m. on Nov. 11, orders were received to begin advancing at 6 a.m. First Sgt. Thomas Shinn described how the 321st Infantry responded to orders in his diary:

The men rubbed their eyes and tightened their belts for there was no water to wash their faces or food to fill their stomachs. The men only took it good naturally and prepared to go over the top in a few minutes. We formed our lines and got in position to advance.

The high explosive shells were falling just as tho' it was raining them from above but we would fall flat on the ground and up again and advance a little further.

About 8:30, we struck a solid line of machine guns and they fired on us. It was a whole woods full. We fought them there for about an hour.

As the battle raged on, the men of the 321st Infantry became "lost in a fog and wading water waist deep." They were caught in a trap and were fired on from all sides. The Captain sent orders to the soldiers in front to hold

their position as they attempted to fight their way out.

We fought there for some time in the marsh up to our waist and the coldest water I ever felt."

They were surrounded by machine guns and barbed wire, making it impossible to advance. The Germans put up a fierce barrage. The barbed wire was 3 feet high and 30 feet thick and they were unable to cut it as it was too strong. Men were killed instantly all around 1st Sgt Shinn of the 321st.

I was wet to my neck and my clothes had frozen stiff on me.

I hadn't seen any fire or shelter for 48 hours and two days without food, water, or sleep was getting on my nerves.

We had to lay low for a half hour or more and while I lay in the shell hole one of my friends came up to me and asked me to send a man to the rear with him. He had his left arm tore off between the elbow and shoulder and he was bleeding very fast. It was the hardest thing I'd ever done to tell him that I couldn't send a man back with him.

The Armistice was signed about 11am but the battle was still raging 15 minutes before. About 10:45a.m., the

[Germans] seemed to shoot every gun they had at the same time for they kept our heads so near the ground that we got our ears full of mud.

At seven minutes to eleven, a runner came up to the Captain out of breath and handed him our orders. Orders were given to cease firing at 11 a.m.

At 11 a.m., we ceased firing and the Germans jumped up, threw their rifles down, and came running to meet us. They wanted to shake hands and talk with us but we made them go back. In those three days fighting, there were 178 killed, nearly 800 wounded, 57 captured, and 6 missing. Of those, the 324th infantry: Killed, 2 officers and 34 men; wounded, 5 officers and 145 men; missing, 18 men. [Source: "Lest We Forget The Record of North Carolina's Own"]

Pvt. Robbins returned with his unit in June 1919. He married in August, returning to Rich Square where he raised a family and farmed the land.

Robert Eugene Robbins passed away March 15, 1960, at 65. He was laid to rest in Cedar Lawn Cemetery in Rich Square.

Sources: Johnson, Clar-

ence 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 experiences 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*; *81st Division Summary of Operations in the World War*, U.S. Government, 1944

Honoring Brunswick County's World War I veterans

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.