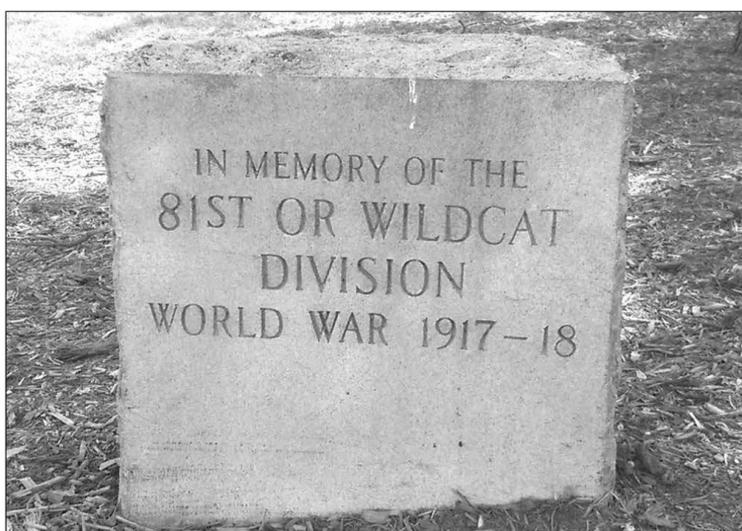


Craven Ledrew Sellers.

Wrestler, 321st Infantry, 81st Division.

Photos contributed by Gwen Causey, granddaughter of Henry Lindon Clemmons



Wildcat Memorial in Raleigh.

World War I Profile: Craven Ledrew Sellers 1889-1960

BY NORMA ECKARD
SPECIAL TO THE BEACON

Craven Ledrew Sellers was born and raised in Brunswick County. His brother, Herbert Teller Sellers, also served in WWI.

His draft registration shows he was single, living in Supply and working as a logging foreman for Waccamaw Shingle Co. in Bolivia.

Ledrew was ordered to report for duty on May 27, 1918. He was sent to Camp Jackson, S.C., for training and then to Camp Sevier in June when he was assigned to Company I, 324th Infantry, 81st "Wildcat" Division.

Previous posts describe the experiences of the 81st Division through the signing of the Armistice. They then prepared for a grueling 15-day hike with full packs. The following excerpts are taken from the history of the 321st infantry:

The 175-kilometer hike from the front to this training area in the vicinity of Chatillon-Sur-Seine will always stand out as one of the greatest feats of our overseas experience. It was a test of physical endurance and morale. Their handicaps included the weakened condition of the men due to exposure and hardships on the front, epidemics of dysentery and bad colds of which 75 percent fell victim, and the bad conditions in which the men marched and slept. That Thanksgiving will be remembered mostly for what we didn't have and didn't do in contrast to what we had had and had done on previous Thanksgivings.

At the end of the 15 days of hard marching, they passed in review at attention with full packs and complete equipment. Aching backs and blistered feet made it hell for us.

Those of us who finished this hike together felt more closely bound together than ever after by those ties of comradeship that had been established on those days at the front. We also felt that we had something in common with the soldiers of past wars who had made long marches under trying conditions.

Most of the French peasants opened their homes and their hearts to us, and showed us a hospitality as genuine and unselfish as our own American homes could have shown the soldiers of any army. The French were keenly appreciative and profoundly thankful for the valuable services of the American soldiers. Many of them sacrificed and toiled day and night for American soldiers in grateful recognition of America's timely aid in the World War.

But the hospitality of the French could not satisfy that longing for home and friends left behind.

We were obsessed with the sole thought of going home.

The introduction of athletics and other activities helped keep them busy and distracted from their homesickness. Football, baseball, basketball, wrestling, theater and shooting contests were enthusiastically attended by all.

They were proud of their division's champions. Besides the wrestler shown here, their baseball team was the best in the Army, having never lost a game either in the States or overseas.

Their play, "O.U. Wildcats," was said to be the most popular in the AEF. It depicted the life of a Doughboy in France. The most popular song was called "The Bloody War." Some of the verses are shown below.

The Bloody War

I was a simple country boy,
I lived out on the farm;
I never even killed a flea
Or done nobody harm.

One day the sheriff caught me,
He says, "Come with me, my son;
Your Uncle Sammy needs you,

To help him "tote" a gun."

They tried to teach me how to drill,
I did the best I could;
But my captain told me to my face,
My head was made of wood.

They sent me out on the range,
To hear the bullets sing;
I shot and shot for one whole day,
And never hit a thing.

My captain said to "Shoot at will,"
I says, "Which one is he?"
That made my captain angry,
And he fired his gun at me.

Now when I struck that foreign shore,
I looked around with glee;
But rain and kilometers,
Were all that I could see.

I ran all over Europe,
Fighting for my life;
Before I'll go to war again,
I'll send my darling wife.

On March 18, 1919, Private Sellers was promoted to mechanic. The orders they were waiting for finally arrived: Prepare to move to the Le Mans area on May 12. They were surprised at their feelings when preparing to leave the French villages they had grown fond of.

Some of them [French villagers], when we told them goodbye, wept as if they were bidding farewell to their sons.

At St. Nazaire, France, where they would embark to return home, they spent four days delousing, bathing, undergoing medical inspections, and fitted with new clothes. They would have more delousing and inspections when arriving in the U.S.

When being discharged from service, they once again underwent strong emotions.

They realized that they would probably never see each other again. Strong friendships had been formed — the one thing that had saved many a soldier from despair, and perhaps suicide.

Mechanic Ledrew Sellers didn't return with his unit. He boarded USS Antigone at St. Aignane a month earlier on May 17, 1919, along with other ill soldiers. The assumption is he fell ill during the six months after the Armistice was signed, as his name does not appear on wounded lists during combat, which were published at the time.

He was honorably discharged on June 1, 1919, with no reported disability.

After the war, he lived in Southport for many years, raising his family and working first as the manager of a sawmill and then a merchant. During the Depression, he was able to get a job at the Civilian Conservation Corps, supervising a forestry group.

At his death in 1960, Craven Ledrew Sellers was laid to rest in Northwood Cemetery in Southport. A military flat marker is shown.

In 2007, his daughter, Susie Carson, along with Larry Maisel, wrote a book about her mother Lelia Jane, published by the Southport Historical Society.

This concludes the Brunswick County WWI veterans who were wounded or killed while serving in the 81st "Wildcat" Division.

A memorial to the 81st Division was erected on the southwest corner of the North Carolina state capitol grounds in

Raleigh and dedicated on October 5, 1941, by the Wildcat Veterans' Association. The marker was dedicated as "an inspiration from the past and a warning to the future."

In all, the "Wildcat" division suffered 1,104 casualties — 248 killed or dead from wounds and 856 wounded — for the short time it was in combat.

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 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. Govt. 1944.

If you would like to help us honor Craven Ledrew Sellers or another Brunswick County WWI veteran, go to www.caswellriflerange.com or email fcaswellriflerange@gmail.com for more information.

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