



This was the insignia of the all-black 92nd Division of the 365th Infantry, whose members served in World War I. The men called themselves the “Buffalo Soldiers” in honor of the African-American unit that served in the West during the Civil War.



Robert Bollie Stanley was the only known prisoner of war from Brunswick County during the Great War. Southport resident Allen Dunstan has made arrangements for Stanley’s grave to have a military marker noting his captivity and receipt of the Purple Heart. The installation ceremony will be May 7.

Black History Month

Soldier who made great sacrifice finally honored with headstone

A century after making a tremendous sacrifice for his country – with his service not noted at his grave – Robert Bollie Stanley will finally be recognized for his heroism.

Stanley was an African-American born in Shallotte who worked at Southport’s Fish Scrap and Oil Co. Twenty-five black men from Brunswick County stepped forward to serve in the Great War; Stanley was among the three who made it through basic training and the two who fought in France.

Stanley is believed to be Brunswick County’s sole prisoner of war in the terrible European conflict. The other two members of the unit were William James Gordon of Southport and William Frederick Brooks of Shallotte. Brooks died of meningitis days after he was scheduled to board a ship to France. Gordon and Stanley reached Brest, France, in June 1918 and camped with other soldiers about 60 miles from the front lines.

After eight weeks of intensive training, the men joined members of the 93rd Division and served in multiple engagements in Meuse-Argonne.

A diary written by the captain of their infantry brings the countryside and experiences alive. It was located by the Friends of Ft. Caswell Rifle Range, a non-profit group that is restoring the rifle training pit that was used to teach American soldiers long-range marksmanship. The Friends group provided research for this and other stories about local historical ties to World War I.

One entry in August describes his first experience of shell fire, giving a glimpse into what Gordon and Stanley were experiencing.

“I had my first experience of shell fire,”

the captain wrote. “It is an experience that one cannot well describe. You hear the boom of the distant gun then the rushing whine and screeching of the shell as it passes, then you wait for the terrific explosion wondering how far beyond you it will strike. It sure causes a weakness in the knees and a funny feeling up your back. The man that says he was not scared at those first shells he heard is either a damn fool or a liar.”

Gordon was shot on November 4, 1918, and returned to the United States with other sick or injured soldiers. He died at the age of 39, and his war injuries were listed as a contributory cause on his death certificate.

Stanley was listed as missing during the deadly, major offensive at the Meuse-Argonne. He was actually wounded and captured by the Germans on October 29, 1918. Released a month later, most of his right leg had to be amputated. He returned home in March 1919.

A February 2018 story in *The State Port Pilot* about Stanley caught the eye of resident Allen Dunstan.

“No one requested a military headstone, so this brave soldier’s sacrifice for his nation is not readily apparent,” the story stated.

Allen contacted *The State Port Pilot* and requested information about the Friends of Ft. Caswell Rifle Range. Eventually, he was able to share the story of how he came to be in Southport and what inspired him to make the donation.

“I arrived in Southport five years ago and a romance was kindled,” Dunstan told the Friends group. “I had never heard of Southport before I came to work at the Duke Energy power plant. Noticing a modest cross-hatch on the road-

map, and that it was near the plant, I decided to check out the area. Seeing the quaint town and waterfront, it was no decision to remain in Southport.

“Exploring the town and surrounding area, I had visited the two cemeteries in town plus the one near Old Brunswick Town. The markers tell a lot more than simply what’s written on them.

“When I read the Buffalo Soldiers article in *The State Port Pilot*, I was touched by the sentence, ‘No one requested a military headstone, so this brave soldier’s sacrifice for his nation is not readily apparent. He remains unknown but to God.’

“On the one hand, I hope we as a nation never learn the identities of the interred unknown soldiers. They must remain unknown but to God, and thereby provide a measure of hope and comfort to many families in that these tombs could be the final resting places of their loved ones. On the other hand, the resting place for Robert Bollie Stanley is known and I thought it would be an encouragement to his family to have his service recognized.”

The Friends group finally located Stanley’s grandson and, thanks to Dunstan’s donation, will install a military marker at the grave. The ceremony at Stanley cemetery is set for 11 a.m. on May 7.

Persons who would like to learn more about Brunswick County’s role in the war and efforts to preserve the rifle range at Caswell Beach should visit: <http://www.caswellriflerange.com>. The mailing address is 5 Foxfire Trace, Caswell Beach, N.C. 28465.

– *Compiled by Lee Hinnant*