



Walter Stephen Brock gravesite (source: The Regimental HQ, 2nd Engineers (1920), San Antonio Printing Co.)



Private Walter Stephen Brock (source: Soldiers of the Great War, Vol. II).



The buildings at Fort Caswell as seen from the Cape Fear River in Southport (source: North Carolina Collection: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill)

WWI Profile: PFC Walter Stephen Brock 1895-1918

By NORMA ECKARD

Walter Stephen Brock was born and raised in New Hanover County, NC.

In 1914, when he was 18 years old, he enlisted in the Regular Army at Fort Caswell.

According to Walter Brock's NC WWI Service Card:

He enlisted in the Regular Army at Fort Caswell, Brunswick County, NC, on July 16, 1914. He served in the 31st Company Coastal Artillery Corps (CAC) until Nov. 2, 1917. He was then assigned to Company A, 7th Engineers (5th Division) until March 25, 1918, and then Company F, 116th Engineers (41st Division) until June 21, 1918, and finally Company B, 2nd Engineers (2nd Division) until his death, KIA, on Nov. 10, 1918.

This information conflicts with information from other sources as shown below. The initial formation of the 2nd Engineers left for France in September 1917 and spent most of their time constructing everything necessary to support a 2,000,000+ strong military force. It appears likely that engineers arriving from the U.S. would be moved into any engineering regiment requiring more personnel.

Other documents from the period show this sequence of events for Private Brock.

Private Brock boarded Leviathan on May 22, 1918. The passenger list shows him in Company A, 7th Engineers (5th Division).

The Unit History for the 2nd Engineers shows Pvt. Brock in the roster. It lists him as having participated in every battle from Chateau Thierry (May 31, 1918) to the Argonne, which ended the war. The "K" before "Argonne" indicates he died during the battle in the Argonne. The "Rhine" is missing in the list because he died before he could join The Army of Occupation.

Yet the newspaper articles shown below state his family received news that he was previously wounded in June, followed by a letter from him in October that stated he was expecting to get back into action soon. There is no record of him being wounded. It was never reported on casualty lists published in newspapers. There is no record of him dying of wounds. The roster above shows him KIA, the newspaper reports in March show him as KIA, as well as the book Soldiers of the Great War, the source of his photo above.

It is typical to find mistakes in historical records. The experience of finding errors was shared in a previous post. In the case of the 2nd Division, their record of hard fighting throughout the war makes it even easier to imagine errors in record keeping.

The 2nd Division lost more men, gained more ground, captured more guns and prisoners, and won more medals than any other American Division. The 2nd Engineers fought every battle with the 2nd Division and fought an additional one without them while the infantry was recuperating. Because of the intensity of the battles of the 2nd Division, the engineers joined the infantry during most of them. It was the 2nd Engineers who inspired the quote seen in a previous post about engineers: "Boy, they dig trenches and mend roads all night, and they fight all day!" Lt. Col. John Thomason, referring to engineers.

Whether Pvt. Brock died of wounds or was KIA, the result was the same: he gave his life for his country.

His death was not reported to his parents. For five months, they were unaware. Then on March 6, 1919, his name appeared on the casualty lists published in newspapers across the

country. He was reported to have been KIA.

About a week later, on March 14, 1919, The Wilmington Morning Star published this on page 5:

Walter C. Brock died in France in November

Was son of Mr. and Mrs. S.E. Brock of Seagate - Wounded last June.

Official notification of the death of their son, Private Walter S. Brock, has just been received by Mr. and Mrs. S.E. Brock, of Seagate, in the form of a statement from France, that he died Nov. 10, and offering condolences to the bereaved parents and relatives.

Mr. Brock, who was in the city yesterday, said he did not understand the cause of his son's death, as he had no information prior to the receipt of the notice, except that his son's name appeared in the list of dead in The Star several days ago. He stated he had wired the department at Washington for further information and for verification of the report immediately upon reading of it in the paper, but had had no reply other than that it was being investigated. The announcement from France came in yesterday.

As no information was given as to the cause of death, the parents don't know whether he died of disease or in battle. They know he was wounded in action last June, but do not know the date, nor the battle, and were never notified as to the extent of his wounds. Since then they have had one letter from him, dated October 19, which indicated that he was well and expecting to get back into action soon.

Private Brock was 23 years old and was a member of Company B, Second Engineers, regular army. He enlisted in 1912 at Fort Caswell and had done eight months' service in Mexico. He went to France early in 1918. He is survived, beside his parents, by two brothers, William and Russell, both residing at Seagate; three sisters, Mrs. Lucian D. Bishop, 215 South Thirteenth street; Mrs. Strange Pridgen, Seagate, and Mrs. Alfred Flowers, of the city.

The remains were interred at Commune de Beaumont, France.

Private Brock's remains were returned on USAT Somme on March 14, 1921.

On April 9, 1921, The Wilmington Morning Star published this on page 3:

Body of veteran is here for interment
Remains Private Walter Brock to be interred today.

Remains of Private Walter S. Brock, of Wrightsville sound, who died in France during the world war, will arrive in the city this morning at 10 o'clock and will be immediately taken to Wrightsville sound cemetery for interment. A large number of legionmen of the Wilmington post will attend the last rites.

Relatives of the dead soldier have just been notified that the remains were in New York. They were shipped there Friday. Although the funeral is not to be military, it will be largely attended by friends, relatives and members of the local post of the American Legion. The funeral service will be held as soon as the remains can be conveyed from the union station to the sound.

Adjutant H.A. Church, of the local post, announced last night that legionmen of the city who attend the funeral will meet at Front and Princess streets shortly before 10 o'clock and board a suburban car for Wrightsville. Commander J.R. Hollis is very anxious to have a large number of legionmen attend the funeral. Private Brock was a native of the Wrightsville sound section.

During the world war he went to France as a member of Company B, second engineers. After several months of service he was injured and as a result died in an army hospital. He was well known in Wilmington.

On April 10, 1921, The Wilmington Morning Star published this on page 11:

Hold funeral today of Private Walter S. Brock

Funeral services of Private Walter S. Brock, who died in France during the world war, will be held this morning at Sea Gate and the interment will be made in Wrightsville Sound cemetery. The remains of the soldier arrived in Wilmington yesterday morning in a metal casket, having just arrived from the battlefields of Europe a few days ago.

There will be a large number of legionmen of the Wilmington post to attend the funeral services. They will leave the city on the 10 o'clock suburban car for Sea Gate. From there they will accompany the remains to the Wrightsville burying grounds.

Commander E.S. Addison, of the coast guard Seminole, will send a firing squad of sailors to fire the regulation salute over the grave and a bugler to sound taps.

Private Brock went to France as a member of company B, second United States engineers. He died of injuries in an army hospital.

On April 11, 1921, The Wilmington Morning Star published this on page 10.

Private Brock laid to rest with comrades in attendance

Last rites over the remains of Private Walter S. Brock, who died in France during the war, were held at 11 o'clock Sunday morning at Sea Gate Baptist church. The interment was made in Giles' cemetery, Wrightsville sound.

There were twenty-odd members of the local post of the American legion present at

the funeral to do honor to this American boy who gave up his life that democracy might be preserved. The active pallbearers consisted entirely of Wilmington legionmen.

Upon the completion of the graveside service a squad of sailors in charge of Petty Officer Ginburg, of the coast guard cutter Seminole, fired the regulation salute. Taps was then sounded by a bugler.

The pallbearers were: Honorary Charlie Summerlin, A.M. Williamson, G.C. Baltzgar, Z.A. Sneeden, J.W. Walton and R.W. Butler; active, Legionmen S. Freeman Yopp, J.J. Neur, J.J. Quinlivan, J.W. McIntire, John C. Moylan, A.E. Wingle and A.E. Werkheiser.

At the church services the building was filled to capacity. The floral offerings were beautiful and many, attesting to the esteem in which the young man held.

Private Walter Stephen Brock was laid to rest in Mount Lebanon Chapel Cemetery in Airlie, New Hanover County, NC.

The writing under his date of birth and death is unclear. If they can be identified in the future, this post will be updated.

If you would like to help us honor Walter Stephen Brock or another Brunswick County WWI veteran, email the Friends of Ft. Caswell Rifle Range at ftcaswellrifle@gmail.com or go to www.caswellrifle.com.

Another Roll Calling event will be held Saturday, April 6, at the rifle range in Caswell Beach starting at 11 a.m. A future fundraiser is scheduled for Saturday, May 4, at the Caswell Beach Town Public Service Facility Building (fire hall) to raise funds to publish the book of Brunswick County men and women that served in WWI; to continue historic restoration on the rifle range memorial; and to honor a Brunswick County WWI veteran. There will be a dinner, derby and dance with music by Three to Get Ready and Trilogy. Call 278-7584 for ticket information or purchase tickets from Ricky Evans Gallery on Howe Street in Southport.