

WWI Profile: Forney Boston Mintz 1892-1960 (Part 1)

BY NORMA ECKARD

GUEST COLUMNIST

*Forney Boston Mintz
Mill Branch, Brunswick
County, N.C.*

*U.S. Army, Sergeant
Served: Jan. 9, 1918 – Jan.
8, 1929*

*Overseas: April 6, 1918 –
April 28, 1919*

*Wounded: Aug. 15, 1918;
Sept. 27, 1918*

*Awarded Distinguished
Service Cross, Silver Star and
Purple Heart with Oak Leaf
Cluster.*

*Note: Due to the amount of
documentation about Forney
Mintz, along with his multiple
medals and association with a
famous event, his WWI Profile
will be posted in two parts.*

Forney Boston Mintz was born and raised in Mill Branch, N.C. He was the third of four brothers, all serving in WWI.

Forney was the first brother to enlist in the U.S. Army in 1913 at age 21. His enlistment shows his height was 5 feet, 5-3/4 inches. He was transferred to the Army Reserves on Jan. 8, 1916, and then returned to active duty on Aug. 22, 1916.

Half-brother Samuel Leob Mintz enlisted in 1916; brothers Martin Newman Mintz and Owen Ransom Mintz were drafted. All four brothers served overseas. Like Forney, Martin and Owen were wounded. WWI Profiles have been posted for Martin Newman Mintz and Owen Ransom Mintz. Leob and Forney made a career in the Army.

Forney was the only soldier from Brunswick County to serve in the 77th Division. He was assigned on Sept. 5, 1917, to Company A, 308th Infantry, 77th Division. At that point, he had been promoted to Sergeant.

The 77th Division, first called the Metropolitan Division but popularly known as the "Statue of Liberty Division" due to the insignia shown, was organized from New York City draftees. Most of the enlisted men were recent immigrants or were poor working class from the streets of New York City. This gave rise to the popular theory that fighting from a young age for food and other attributes acquired on the streets contributed to their survival in the Argonne.

Soldiers from 25 different nationalities were part of the division, reflecting the melting pot of NYC.

"The recruits represented all races and all creeds – men who had only recently been subjected to the pogroms of Russia, gunmen and gangsters, a type peculiar to New York City, Italians, Chinamen, the Jews and the Irish, a heterogeneous mass, truly representative both of the varied human flotsam and the sturdy American manhood which comprise the civil population of New York City."

One of those members was songwriter Irving Berlin, then age 30. Berlin who was already famous, wrote and produced a musical show called "Yip, Yip, Yaphank" about the experience of training at Camp Upton.

The show featured the song "Oh, How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning," which Berlin performed. The song related how the soldier hated the bugler who woke up the troops each day.

Source: World War I draftees from New York City made history in the 77th Division.

Sgt. Mintz trained with the 77th Division at Camp Upton, one of the two military bases on Long Island. The other was Camp Mills, where the 42nd Division was assembled. (Recall that the 42nd Division included many Brunswick County men.) Both divisions captured the hearts of the citizens of New York.

The photo of Sgt. Mintz is included in "Our Company," a book about Company A of the 308th Infantry. The book is in rhyme form. About Sgt. Mintz, the book includes the following:

On April 6, 1918, Sgt. Mintz sailed on Lapland for France. The 77th Division was the first draftee division to arrive in France and the first to take front line positions. By the end of August, the division

had losses equal to nearly one third of its strength.

In early September, the Regiment was moved to the Argonne Forest as part of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. The Meuse-Argonne Offensive was the largest and deadliest battle in US military history, involving 1.2 million American soldiers. It occurred at the same time influenza was raging, claiming lives in Europe and back home. The 308th had been continually in the front line from June 20th until September 15th. Facing the Argonne Forest, the 77th Division was positioned at the left flank of the American forces, with the 308th Infantry at the extreme left. The exhaustion from continuous fighting, the pandemic, and the soon to be exposed left flank all contributed to the tragedy that followed.

To the 77th Division was assigned the task of direct attack through the forest. After the first day, this Division operated alone within the confines of this forest, and fought its way through its entire length.

On the night of Sept. 25, the Infantry of the 77th Division quietly moved into the front line – History of the 77th Division.

The battle began in the early hours of Sept. 26, 1918, through a dense fog. That day, PFC Louis "Lolly" B. Doerr from our World War I Wall of Honor, was KIA. He served with the 302nd Engineers of the 77th Division.

The "Wilderness Battle" of the Great War had begun. Overcoats and blankets had been discarded and very limited amounts of food were carried by each man.

Through a tangled jungle of trees, clinging vines and thickly braided brush, through swamps and muddy morasses flooded by constant rains that were falling, over steep and across wild valleys, through the mud and the wet and the cold, the unfaltering soldiers of the 77th Division were obliged to push on day after day, against invisible machine guns, against trenches concealed by foliage and underbrush, against positions whose forward areas were perfectly protected by numerous lines of barbed wire and chicken wire interlaced among trees, against an enemy who could not be seen to be fired at and who could only be nosed out and routed by attacking parties that crawled along the ground and scouted from tree to tree until they could engage him in hand-to-hand combat.

Told to "push forward without regard to flanks" by Oct. 2, six companies of the

308th Infantry, commanded by Major Charles S. Whittlesey, along with one company from the 307th Infantry and two companies of the 306th Machine Gun Battalion, penetrated a gap in the German trenches and advanced to a ravine at Charlevaux Mill. At this point, a total of about 700 men were cut off and surrounded on all sides by the Germans and remained there for five days. Food and medical supplies depleted, men were lost one by one, shot while trying to find food or water or retrieve supplies dropped in the area, fallen by illnesses or effects of no food and water, or died of wounds.

Communications were a problem. Runners couldn't successfully deliver messages, so homing pigeons were used. In one incident, when the battalions were being hit by American artillery, a homing pigeon sent a famous message to stop the barrage and became a hero.

"Five days later, 194 survivors walked out of the ravine and into history..." – Robert J. Laplander.

WWI Profile: Cher Ami 1910-1919

*Cher Ami ("dear friend")
U.S. Army
Served: 1914-1918
Wounded: Oct. 3, 1918
Awarded Croix de Guerre
Medal with a palm Oak Leaf
Cluster*

Cher Ami carried the famous message back to headquarters.

We are along the road parallel to 276.4. Our own artillery is dropping a barrage directly on us. For heavens sake stop it.

While the artillery had discovered their mistake minutes before Cher Ami returned, she nevertheless became a hero. She had been shot through the breast, blinded in one eye, and had a leg hanging only by a tendon. 77th Division medics worked to save her life. Her leg could not be saved, so a small wooden one was carved for her.

When she died in 1919, Cher Ami's body was mounted by a taxidermist (who discovered the male pigeon was actually a female) and put on display at the Smithsonian Institution.

Sgt Mintz had been wounded on September 28. Was he a member of the Lost Battalion? He did not appear on the Lost Battalion list. Robert J. Laplander, the world's leading historian of the Lost Battalion and WWI Centennial Commission's Managing Director of Finding the Lost Battalion,

was contacted to confirm. No, Sgt Mintz was not a member of the Lost Battalion.

"Sergeant Mintz was rescued from the field after he was wounded by Private Stephan Wondolowsky, a Polish immigrant living in Brooklyn of Company A, who dressed his wounds and carried him back to a safer area, from which Mintz then rounded up the two prisoners and headed back to a first aid station behind the lines. His combat days were pretty much behind him after that, although he did return to Company A and was with them for the final drive to the Meuse River and returned home with them on April 28, 1919."

Three members of the Regiment were awarded the Medal of Honor for their service during the First World War. Two of these men, Major Charles W. Whittlesey and Captain George G. McMurtry, were recognized for their actions during the "Lost Battalion" period while in command of the units trapped in the ravine. Additionally, 75 members of the Regiment were awarded the Distinguished Service Cross and a further two the Croix de Guerre.

Sgt Forney B. Mintz was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. The following citation accompanied the award:

"Forney B. Mintz, Sgt. Co. A, 308th Inf., for extra ordinary heroism in action near Binarville, France, Sept. 28, 1918. Sgt. Mintz, in command of a platoon, worked his way through the enemy rear guard and captured 5 machine guns and an ammunition carrying party. Although badly wounded when an organized position of the enemy was encountered, he made his way back to request reinforcements and brought with him two German prisoners from whom valuable information was obtained."

Throughout its service in France, the 77th Division sustained 10,194 casualties: 1,486 killed and 8,708 wounded.

The story of the Lost Battalion was one of the most talked about events of World War I. It even made its way into a soldier's diary. Diary of a Rainbow Veteran (source listed at bottom) entry of Oct. 9, 1918, includes the following:

"The Division that is now getting the "razz" is the 77th (New York). Their emblem is the Statue of Liberty. Now since the lost battalion has become famous, all the other divisions say that this insignia represents a French made-



Photos contributed

Photo of Forney Mintz.



77th Infantry Division patch.

moiselle carrying a torch and looking for the lost battalion."

Read the WWI Profile of Forney Mintz (Part 2) next week.

Sources

Adams, John Wesley; McCollum, Lee C. (1919) Our Company. Seattle, Lumberman Printing Co.

Laplander, Robert John (2017). Finding the Lost Battalion: Beyond the Rumors, Myths and Legends of America's Famous WWI Epic. Waterford, WI: Lulu Press.

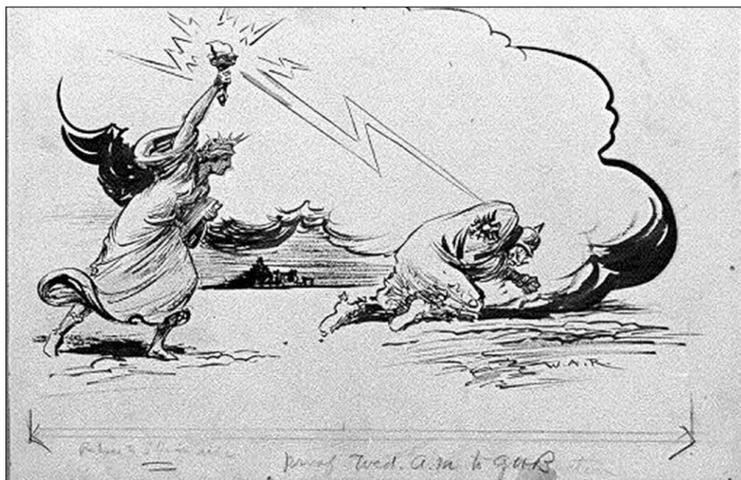
Sherwood, Elmer W. (1929). Diary of a Rainbow

Veteran. Terre Haute, Ind., Moore-Langen.

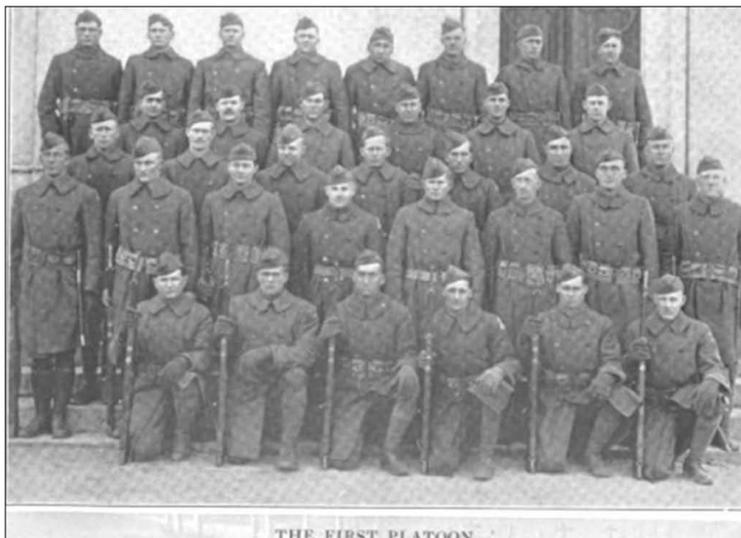
History of the 77th Division (1919). NY: 77th Division Association.

If you would like to help us honor Forney Boston Mintz or another Brunswick County WWI veteran, email Friends of Ft. Caswell Rifle Range at fcaswellriflerange@gmail.com or go to caswellriflerange.com.

Another Roll Call is planned for Veterans Day, Monday, Nov. 11, at 11 a.m. beside the 1918 Fort Caswell Rifle Range Memorial in Caswell Beach. The public is welcome.



Lady Liberty strikes the Kaiser.



Forney Mintz's 1st Platoon photo, second row, fourth from the right.