

Lonnie Rich

From: Richard A. Holt <rescuedog646@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, January 14, 2019 11:21 AM
To: Lonnie Rich
Subject: Fwd: Danda and WWI
Attachments: Lonnie 2.rtf

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Richard A. Holt <rescuedog646@gmail.com>
Date: Sun, Jan 13, 2019 at 1:42 PM
Subject: Re: Danda and WWI
To: <pete646@aol.com>

Lonnie,

Glad to hear from you. Sorry the delay in responding, had to do a little research. In answer to your question, Lonnie was drafted into the 57th Pioneer Infantry. Attached is the regiment's letterhead logo and an image of the troop ship "Leviathan" at sea in September 1918, when Lonnie was aboard on the way to France.

When the pioneer infantry regiments were announced by the Army, it stated that the pioneers would be specially trained and equipped to follow an attack and make immediate repairs, while at the same time be prepared to fight as infantry. They would also have the role of guarding depots, railroads, supplies and engineering works of different kinds. Overall, the pioneer infantry regiments would act as modified engineering and labor outfits, while also furnishing replacement troops for combatant units. Thirty-seven pioneer regiments in total would be organized, with white officers and black enlisted men composing twenty of the regiments and white officers and enlisted men making up the other seventeen. Of the twenty-four pioneer infantry regiments sent to France, seven of were organized at Camp Wadsworth, SC in January of 1918 using the officers and men left surplus from the reorganization of the National Guard regiments. One of these seven regiments was the 57th Pioneer Infantry.

The state based National Guard organizations were all mobilized into federal service between July and August of 1917 and then reorganized by the War Department to meet changes in military strategy, tactics and service of supply necessitated by the battlefield warfare conditions in Europe. The reorganization broke up and consolidated various organizations, including the 1st Vermont Infantry Regiment, the only National Guard unit maintained by the state of Vermont, which was deemed insufficient in number of men to remain an intact Regular infantry regiment. The 1st Vermont Infantry Regiment was ordered to be broken up on August 17th and by the first week of September, 23 officers and 1,338 enlisted men had been reassigned to units of the 26th ("Yankee") Division, so named since it was formed from different National Guard units from the New England states. Once skeletonized, the 1st Vermont Infantry Regiment was considered to be surplus and in November, the remainder of the 31 officers and 312 enlisted men were sent to Camp Greene, located at Charlotte, North Carolina. On February 9, 1918 the balance of the officers and men from the 1st Vermont Infantry Regiment were assigned to the 57th Pioneer Infantry and ordered to Camp Wadsworth, arriving there on February 20th. At Camp Wadsworth, the 57th Pioneer Infantry became part of the Provisional Depot Corp and Army Troops Division, along with the remnants of other National Guard units not utilized in the organization of the 18 army divisions formed by the reorganization of the National Guard. The 57th Pioneer Infantry was brought up to regimental strength by filling its ranks with recruits newly drafted into the Army, most of whom would be drawn from the state of Tennessee, including Lonnie and B.D.

Timeline of Lonnie's military service and related events:

1918

MAR-APR: Outbreak of influenza occurred near simultaneously in the United States, Asia and Europe. This outbreak is what would be three waves influenza outbreak that made up the Spanish flu pandemic.

JUN 5: Registered for the military draft. This was the 2nd of 3 drafts and was for those men who had attained the age of 21 after 5JUN1917 (the 1st draft).

AUG 27: Two sailors newly arrived from overseas reported ill with influenza at the Receiving Ship (naval barracks) located at the Commonwealth Pier in Boston, Massachusetts. Their arrival coincided with a virulent form of the "three-day" fever, which had returned among the troops in France on August 9th. The H.M.S. "Mantua", a British warship, departed from Plymouth, England on July 31st, while influenza was epidemic at the port. When the ship arrived on August 15th at Freetown, Sierra Leone, the capital and principal harbor of this British colony located in West Africa, 200 of its sailors were very ill with influenza. Against medical warnings, the ship was resupplied with coal brought on board by local laborers and by August 27th, 500 of the 600 laborers from the coaling station had become ill with a virulent form of influenza. This was the beginning of the second and most deadly wave of the Spanish Flu pandemic.

SEP 5: Inducted for military service and entrained from Trenton, TN for Camp Wadsworth, SC

SEP 8: Reported for military duty at Camp Wadsworth & assigned to Co. "C", 57th PI. B.D. Mills (the then fiancé of Ethel Fly, our Aunt Ethel), was also assigned to this same company.

SEP 23: The 3,430 officers and men of the 57th PI began departing from Camp Wadsworth by train for transfer Camp Merritt, NJ. By this time, influenza had begun rapidly spreading out from the North-East to the rest of the country. On this date, Camp Merritt, recorded the camp's highest death toll from the Spanish Flu. In other words, the 57th PI was traveling directly into what the CDC would now term a infectious "Hot Zone". [Note: Lonnie had ONLY 15 days of basic training!]

SEP 24: 1st reported case of Spanish Flu at Camp Wadsworth, SC.

SEP 26: The 57th PI arrived at Camp Merritt, New Jersey to be equipped for overseas duty on the same day that the 1st case of the Spanish Flu was reported at Camp Wadsworth, SC. The previous day, Camp Merritt had the recorded the camp's highest death toll from the Spanish Flu. Although Lonnie regiment was quarantined from the other units, the men shared the same mess facilities as the other soldiers in the camp, including those ill or already exposed.

SEP 27: The 57th PI began marching late at night from Camp Merritt down to Alpine Landing on the Hudson River to catch boats that would ferry the men to the dock at Hoboken, New Jersey to board the "Leviathan" (the renamed German cruise liner "Vaterland", which had been the world's largest cruise liner at the time it was seized by the US government). During the march, an unknown number of men became ill from the Spanish Flu, fell out of formation and never reached the ferry boats. Before the ship could set sail, an additional 100+ people were also removed due to being ill from the flu.

SEP 29: The "Leviathan" departed from Hoboken. Of the nearly 2,000 ship's crew and 9,366 troops on board the "Leviathan", the only complete military unit was the 57th PI. This was the beginning date of Lonnie's overseas service.

SEP 29-OCT 7: The "Leviathan" quickly ran into rough seas, with Lonnie recalling that he ate only small bites of food on a regular basis to help minimize being sea sick. For an image of the "Leviathan" at sea during this voyage: <https://i.pinimg.com/originals/0b/92/e7/0b92e791b079cd7a7ab6a7481edd9291.jpg>. Seasickness was minor compared to how bad conditions rapidly became on board the ship due to the Spanish Flu. Two reports graphically describe what happened:

Statement of Col. E.W. Gibson, 57th PI: "We had on board 9,033 officers and men and about 200 army nurses on their way to hospitals in France. The presence of the nurses was very fortunate as it afterwards turned out. The ship was packed, conditions were such that the influenza bacillus could breed and multiply with extraordinary swiftness. We went much of the way without convoy. The U-boat menace made it necessary to keep every port hole closed at night, and the air below decks where the men slept was hot and heavy. The number of sick increased rapidly. Washington was appraised of the situation, but the call for men for the Allied armies was so great, that we must go on at any cost. The sick bay became overcrowded and it became necessary to evacuate the greater portion of deck "E" and turn that into sick quarters. Doctors and nurses were stricken. Every available doctor and nurse was utilized to the limit of endurance."

Report of Dr. H.A. May, Navy Medical Officer, S.S. Leviathan: "within a few hours after leaving the piers at Hoboken, about fifty cases of influenza had been admitted to the sick bay. There were but 14 Army Medical Officers and 48 Army Hospital Corpsmen available for duty. Under normal conditions this personnel would have not been sufficient. In the face of such an epidemic as this, the combined Navy and Army medical force has not been enough to properly care for the stricken." Dr. May relates how the rapid spread of the epidemic made necessary the vacation of compartment after compartment to provide space for the sick, which necessarily led to crowding in other sections of the ship. He tells how a great part of "E" deck became a hospital ward, and of the difficulties experienced because the top bunk in the standees could not be reached by the nurses. Doctors and nurses were stricken by the disease and thus became not only unable to aid, but also an added burden to the overworked medical personnel. Every available medical officer, nurse and hospital orderly was utilized "to the limit of endurance." There are no means of knowing the actual number of sick at any one time, but it is estimated that fully 700 cases had developed by the night of September 30. They were brought to the sick bay from all parts of the ship, in a continuous stream, only to be turned away because all beds were occupied. Most of them lay down on the decks, inside and out, and made no effort to reach the compartment where they belonged. In fact, practically no one had the slightest idea where he did belong, and he left his blankets, clothing kit, all and all his possessions to be salvaged at the end of the journey. Late in the evening of this day, the "E" deck ward was opened on the starboard side, and was filled before morning. The conditions during the night cannot be visualized by anyone who has not actually seen them. Pools of blood from the severe nasal hemorrhages of many patients, were scattered throughout the compartment, and the attendants were powerless to escape tracking through the mess, because of the narrow passages between the bunks. Everyone called for water and lemons and oranges. A plentiful supply enabled their desire to be gratified. But within a few minutes of the first distribution of fruit, the skins and pulp were added to the blood and vomitus upon the decks. The decks became wet and slippery, groans and cries of the terrified added to the confusion of the applicants clamoring for treatment, and altogether a true inferno reigned supreme. In the "E" deck ward, every possible appliance for the care of the sick was furnished to the Army surgeons on duty. The commissary Officer placed at our disposal stewards, cooks and mess men, and furnished the kind of food required, in the best possible fashion. I cannot speak in terms of sufficient commendation of the work of the hospital corps of the ship. During this last voyage, many of them worked twenty-four hours at a stretch amid conditions that can never be fully understood by one ashore or on a man-of-war. Some of the embalmers worked at their gruesome task for forty-eight hours at a stretch without complaint. The cause of the epidemic was influenced materially by these main factors: First, the widespread infection of several organizations before they embarked, and their assignment to many different parts of the ship; Second, the type of men comprising the most heavily infected group. Large numbers of them were unable to read or write and some did not know their right hand from their left. Many of them had been in the service not more than three or four weeks and knew nothing of discipline; and the meaning of personal cleanliness and the methods of self-protection from disease was as a closed book to them; and Third, the absolute lassitude of those becoming ill caused them to lie in their bunks without complaint until their infection had become profound and pneumonia had set in. The severe epistaxis (nose bleed), which ushered in the disease in a very large proportion of the cases, caused a lowering of resisting powers, which was added to by fright, by the confined space, and the motion of the ship. Where pneumonia set in, not one man was in condition to make a fight for life. As noted above, the sick bay was filled a few hours after leaving Hoboken. Until the fifth day of the voyage, few patients could be sent to duty, because of great weakness following the drop in temperature, as they grew better. The "E" deck ward was more than full all the time, and there were many ill in various spaces in other parts of the ship. Morning of October 2nd, brought no relief. Things seemed to grow worse instead of better. Cleaning details were demanded of the Army, but few men responded. Those who came would stay awhile and wander away, never to be seen again. No N.C.O.'s were sent with them, and there was no organization for control. The nurse made a valiant effort to clean up and the Navy corpsmen did marvels of work, but always against tremendous odds. Only by constant patrolling between the bunks could any impression be made upon the litter, and finally our own sailors were put on the job. They took hold like veterans and the place was kept respectfully clean thereafter. The first death of pneumonia occurred on this day, and the body was promptly embalmed and encased in a Navy

standard casket. October 3: 3 deaths, 900 cases. October 4: 7 deaths. The sea was rough and the ship rolled heavily. Hundreds were miserable from seasickness and others from terror of the strange surrounds and the ravage of the epidemic. Each succeeding day of the voyage was worse than those preceding, a nightmare of weariness and anxiety on the part of nurse, doctors and hospital corpsmen. No one thought of bed for himself, and all hands worked day and night. On the 5th, there were ten deaths, on the 6th there were 24, and the 7th the day of arrival at our destination (Brest), the toll was 31. The Army ambulance boat was promptly alongside, and debarkation of the sick began around noon. The sick bay was cleared first and we at once thereafter began to clean up in preparation for the wounded to be carried westbound. "E" deck was then evacuated, but all the sick could not be handled before night, about 300 remaining on board. On the 8th, these were taken off by the Army, but not before 14 more deaths had occurred. The nurses remained until the last sick man was taken off. It is my opinion that there were fully 2,000 influenza cases on board during the voyage. Pneumonia cases must have numbered at least 100, but in the unavoidable confusion due to the rapid spread of the disease, it is impossible to be exact. Cases of pneumonia were found dying in various parts of the ship, and many died in the "E" deck ward a few minutes after admission. Owing to the public character of that ward, men passing would see a vacant bunk and lie down without applying for a medical officer at all. Records were impossible, and even identification of patient was extremely difficult, because hundreds of men had blank tags tied around their necks, many were either delirious or too ill to know their own names; 966 patients were removed by the Army hospital authorities in France. Ninety-one deaths occurred among the Army personnel, of whom one was an officer. Date & deaths: October 2 (2), 3 (3), 4 (7), 5 (10), 6 (24), 7 (31), 8 (14), crew of Leviathan (5)."

OCT 7: Statement of Col. E.W. Gibson, 57th PI: "We landed at Brest, October 7th, and all who were able to march were moved to the mudflats beyond Pontanezzan Barracks, where we remained until October 11th. Several hundred of the men never reached camp or their organizations. They were picked up by the Y.M.C.A. or K.C. men or by army ambulances and taken to hospitals as soon as they were unable to walk. Official records show that within a few days after landing, 123 men died at Kerhuon Hospital, about forty at Base Hospital No. 33, several at Naval Base Hospital No. 5, and at the hospital at Landernau. Nearly two hundred of the regiment are buried in the American cemetery at Lambazellec."

Lonnie stated he became ill with the Spanish Flu, but suffered no complications from it, but B.D. Mills was not so lucky, as he got extremely sick and was immediately hospitalized on arrival at Brest. An American Legion report on B.D.'s service record noted: "[He] received treatment for influenza from October 7th." B.D. informed the American Legion that on arrival at Brest, he had been placed in Base Hospital #65, but that no physician, nurse, or attendant had been present. B.D. would remain hospitalized during his entire time overseas, and although ill, he still had to perform guard duty. The combination of his compromised immune system and exposure to inclement weather was a major factor in him contracting pulmonary tuberculosis, which would ultimately lead to his death later in 1924.

OCT 12: 57th PI relocated to Cremay, remaining there 2 weeks

OCT 30: 57th PI arrived at Lemans, with Lonnie then reassigned to the 330th Infantry. After arriving in France, the 57th Pioneer Infantry had been scheduled to be converted to the 398th Infantry Regiment within the 100th Division, but instead the soldiers of the 57th pioneer Infantry were assigned to either the 330th or 331st Infantry Regiments of the 83rd ("Ohio") Division. The 83rd Division had been designated as a Depot Division after arriving in France earlier in June and was based in the Le Mans area, about halfway between Paris and St. Nazaire, where its soldiers trained as replacements for the combat divisions fighting on the front lines.

NOV 11: Signing of the Armistice which ended the war, with no further need for combat training. All military activity after this was related to occupation and demobilization activities.

DEC 12: Lonnie reassigned to the 61st Guard Co., ASC [American Service Corp] The ASC operated units assigned to the 11 sections of the Service of Supply for the American Expeditionary Force. I believe this is the unit where Lonnie was assigned to military postal service duty.

1919

JUL 4: Returned from overseas

JUL 19: Honorably discharged from military service.

I heard a few stories about his experience in France, but he apparently never talked about the experience aboard the "Leviathan". One story was that he humorously recalled was when a fellow soldier was walking across a hay covered second floor of a barn and had suddenly fallen through a hole in floor to the first floor. Another incident he recalled was when he and other soldier's were billeted in a farmer's unheated barn in the cold. Provisions had been in short supply, so when they uncovered the farmer's cache of potatoes, they cooked and ate them. The farmer promptly reported them to the Military Police and they were subsequently locked up in a nearby base's brig while the incident was being investigated. They thought being in the brig was great, as they not only got fed regular rations, but were also warm.

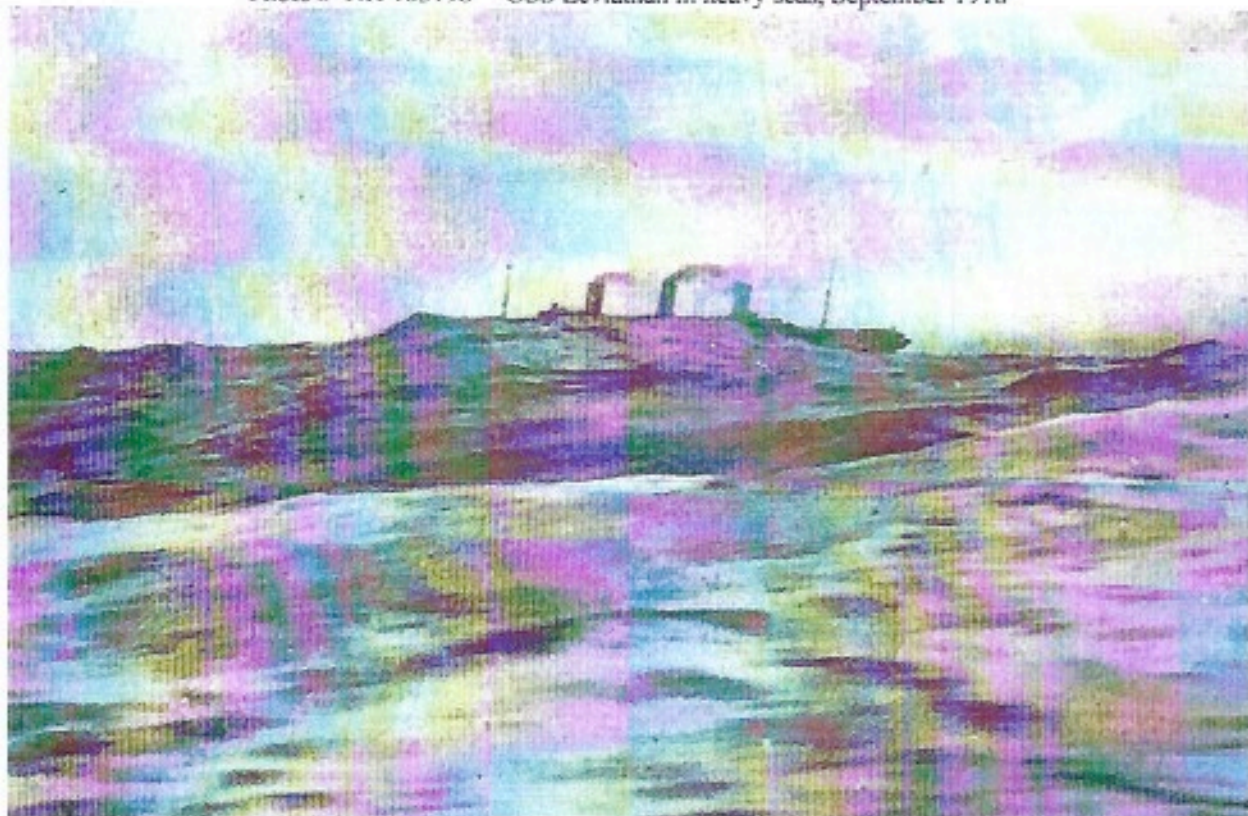
Hope this answers your questions. A great read on the Spanish Flu is Alfred W. Crosby's "America's Forgotten Pandemic". Looking forward to seeing at the next Holt Huddle.

Regards,
Richard

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PIONEER INFANTRY

Photo # NH 103198 USS Leviathan in heavy seas, September 1918



CUTTING THROUGH A HEAVY SEA ON THE WAY OVER.
Taken a mile away from the "Great Northern," Sept., 1918.