



John Anthony McNearney

John McNearney was born on February 23, 1844 in Savage/Burnsville, Minnesota to James McNearney (1860-1941) and Mary Ellen Slater (1870-1937). John had a younger brother that also served in WWI. They were a farm family that lived on Crystal Lake Road. When he registered for the draft on June 2, 1917 in Lakeville he was 23 and working for his Uncle on his farm in North Dakota.

John enlisted on May 28, 1918. He was sent to Camp Lewis, Washington to train with the 160th Infantry, 40th Division, Company E. Camp Lewis was established as the training camp for the 91st “Wild West” Infantry Division of

the National Army (National Guard) which was comprised of inducted men from at least 14 states. He left for France, from Brooklyn, New York in August of 1918 on the SS Nestor. When he arrived in France, he was reassigned to the 308th Infantry, 77th Division, Company H. The

308th Infantry Regiment was best known for the experiences of several of its companies, including Company H, which formed part of the "Lost Battalion" after becoming isolated behind German lines in an attack on the Argonne Forest in October 1918. On October 18, 1918 parts of the 40th and 77th were sent to an undefended gap between the German and American lines that was actually a deep ravine known as the “pocket”. It was located on the edge of the Argonne Forest near the Aisne River in NE France. Considered Impregnable, the Argonne Forest was a natural stronghold. There they were met with stiff resistance. Then they lost their communication link and were trapped. They held their position in the “gap” without food or water for six full days as they continued to fight. With the capture of this key tactical location, the American forces were able to accomplish what the British and French had not been able to do in four years. In John’s own words “October 2nd found William Burns was still with me. Nick Kurtz got wounded. On October 3rd, Richard Hyde of St Paul and George Nies of Montana was with me and Burns only in another foxhole about four feet away. Hyde and Nies were killed by a high explosive shell and I brought Hyde’s watch back to his mother in St Paul. I did not know until the morning of October 8th that we had been relieved. We got some eats, and I was so hungry that I could not eat more than a bite at a time. It nearly choked me when I first tried. We also got orders to help bury the dead and I buried Nies and Hyde on a hillside.” His unit sailed home on the USS America from Brest, France.

When they made it home, they participated in the grand parade in New York City on April 28, 1919 as heroes. He was discharged from Camp Dodge, Iowa on May 18, 1919. He returned home and lived with his parents on the farm in Burnsville until they passed away. He then moved to Lakeville. He worked in Building Construction as a Carpenter. He never married. John died on July 30, 1964 at the age of 70. He is buried at Fort Snelling National Cemetery in Minneapolis.

The quote by John was found in the book “Lost Battalion” Survivors from Minnesota and the Northwest” by Carl J Peterson