

History Space: Doughboys and Flyboys

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(Photo: Courtesy Steve W.
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Nov. 11, 2018, marks the 100th anniversary of the armistice that concluded World War I, known variously at “The Great War” and “The War to End All Wars.” The latter title as evidenced by subsequent wars proved, unfortunately, inaccurate.

World War I pitted the Central Powers (Germany,

Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Turks) against the Allied Powers (Great Britain and her Commonwealth Allies, France, Russia, Italy, Japan, and the United States) beginning in 1917. Over 65 million men around the globe answered the call to arms during this time, with some 8.5 million meeting their deaths in combat (mostly from heavy artillery) and over 21 million sustaining wounds; nearly 8 million are still listed as missing in action and are unaccounted for.



“You Are Wanted By the U.S. Army,” c. 1916, by K.M. Bara, American, dates unknown. Collection of Middlebury College Museum of Art. Purchase with funds provided by Walter Cerf Art Fund. (Photo: Henry Sheldon Museum/courtesy)

In addition to these casualties, the Great War, by numerous estimates, caused 13 million civilian deaths from starvation, exposure, diseases, bombardments, and massacres. For the United States, 117,000 military personnel died and another 202,000 were wounded in less than two years of direct involvement (although more men died from the effects of the Spanish Influenza rather than fatal combat). In short, the First World War left an indelible mark on every nation involved.

Cognizant of its 1882 chartered mission as an Art Museum and Historical Society, the Henry Sheldon Museum of Middlebury has mounted the exhibit “Doughboys and Flyboys: From the Home and Battlefield — WWI Stories by Vermonters of Middlebury & Addison County.” It features posters and letters exchanged between a Middlebury physician,

Jacob Johnson Ross, who served as flight surgeon stationed in France with the 17th Aero Squadron and his wife Hannah Elizabeth Holmes Ross, who remained in Middlebury with their three children, all under the age of 10, all from the Sheldon's collection.



“Americans All!,” 1919, Howard Chandler Christy. Collection of Henry Sheldon Museum of Vermont History. (Photo: Henry Sheldon Museum/courtesy)

In addition, local residents whose relatives served in various capacities during the war loaned relevant WWI memorabilia.

To complement the historic material, internationally-known Brandon artist Fran Bull has mounted an art installation based on the classic WWI poem “In Flanders Fields” by Lt. Col. John McCrae, M.D., a Canadian who prior to the war taught pathology at the Medical College of the University of Vermont, where Dr. Ross was one of his students.

Vermonters respond to WWI

According to records published in 1927 by Vermont's adjutant general, a total of 16,020 Vermonters served in World War I, of which 629 were killed in action or died in service, while an additional 778 were wounded in action. Federal Census records indicate that Vermont's population in 1910 before the war was 356,000 and in 1920, after the war, was 352,500. “Doughboys and Flyboys” highlights Addison County residents who served during WWI, which according to the 1927 adjutant general's report were 781 men, 41 of whom were killed in action or died in service, 43 of whom were wounded in action.

Recruitment posters promoted patriotic enlistments as evidenced by this poster with Gen. Pershing on horseback “The Army Wants You,” and this war poster “Americans All,” which celebrates the diversity of over a dozen immigrant enlistees.



Middlebury's Dr. and Mrs. Jacob Ross with children Katherine and Ruth. Dr. Ross served as a flight surgeon in World War I in France. (Photo: Courtesy of the family of Dr. Ross)



A moment of silliness at Soncamp, France. Enjoying what appears to be a Champagne breakfast are left to right, seated: pilots Leonard Desson, Howard Burdick, John Donoho (face hidden) by glass, Frank Dixon. The four are under the watchful eye of Dr. Jacob J. Ross of Middlebury. (Photo: Courtesy of the family of Dr. Ross)

World War I enlistment records indicate that one quarter of the 1918 draftees in the United States were foreigners, often recent arrivals, and that “even though the doughboys spoke 29 different languages, making training and command difficult, the immigrants fought as bravely and desperately as native-born Americans.” Among the local Middlebury enlistees was recent immigrant Edward Serafino Calvi who had immigrated from Locana, Italy.

Central to the exhibit are the histories, memorabilia, photographs, and documentation of five Middlebury residents:

•**Jacob J. Ross, M.D.** served as flight surgeon in France with the 17th Aero Squadron caring for the sick and wounded. Letters exchanged between Dr. Ross and his wife, Hannah Elizabeth Holmes Ross, who remained in Middlebury with their three young children all under the age of 10, reflect the challenges of the home and battlefield.

The Aero Squadron's Adjutant and Historian Frederick Mortimer Clapp indicated the concerns of Dr. Ross were universal. “He managed the flying officers as you would a football team in training, and the enlisted men as you would the students of technical school. In his free time on days of bad weather he tried to see as much as he could of service at the Front, visiting all nearby hospitals and clearing stations, helping the British with sick call and medical attention in neighboring squadrons, or assisting at operations through the night when the wounded were pouring in the C.C.S. [Casualty Clearing Station] near Doullens, during the first days of the British push.”

In turn his wife described the scarcity of medical doctors in Middlebury and Vermont, the closings of churches, movie theaters, and public gatherings due to the Spanish influenza epidemic, which would claim the life of their 5 year old daughter Ruth in April 1919, just weeks after Dr. Ross finally returned to a joyous reunion with his family.



1st Lt. Waldo Heinrichs of Middlebury following one of his plane accidents. He was a pilot with the 95th Aero Squadron, known then as “luckiest man in the war” for surviving two plane crashes and internment in a German hospital. *(Photo: Courtesy of the family of Waldo Heinrichs)*

•**Waldo Heinrichs** was a pilot with the 95th Aero Squadron, known then as “luckiest man in the war” for surviving two plane crashes and internment in a German hospital. His war diary accompanied by photos from the 95th Aero Squadron are featured in “First to the Front: The Aerial Adventures of 1st Lt. Waldo Heinrichs and the 95th Aero Squadron 1917-1918” by Charlie Woolley of Rochester, Vermont. Injuries sustained when attacked in the second accident, included “two bullets [that] hit him in the left arm, breaking his elbow. Others smashed through his right hand, left thigh, ankle and right heel.”

The plane crashed in German territory when, “slumped in the gory cockpit with his own blood puddling around his feet, Heinrichs suddenly remembered War department orders to burn any aircraft about to fall into enemy hands. He took a box of matches from his pocket, but could not light them with his shattered left arm. Undaunted, he broke the fuel lead, allowing gasoline to splash all over the cockpit, then tried to hold the box in his mouth while striking the match with his right hand. The effort failed. The bullet that had taken out most of his teeth had also broken both his jaws.”

He was immediately captured by four dozen German infantrymen. Post war in 1934, Heinrichs joined the faculty of Middlebury College, where he later was promoted to professor of contemporary civilization. He retired in 1956 and died in 1959. Visitors to the exhibit can read “First to the Front: The Aerial Adventures of 1st Lt. Waldo Heinrichs” and view multiple images of planes and pilots from the 95th Aero Squadron.

•**Stephen Freeman** was at Harvard when the United States declared war on Germany. At the age of 18 Freeman enlisted, trained as a naval pilot, but the Navy did not qualify him as a naval aviator until his 20th birthday, when designated “Naval Aviator number 1091.”

His duty stations during the war were in the United States, where he helped train naval pilots and he was later stationed at Rockaway Station, New York and accompanied the convoy in December, 1918 that took President Wilson to the Peace Conference in Paris. After the Armistice, he was released from active duty and returned to Harvard.

Soon after earning his graduate degrees, he joined the faculty of Middlebury College, and was soon elevated to professor of French and dean of the French Summer School, Director of all the Language Schools at the College, and for a short time was interim President of the College. He died in 1999 at the age of 101. Visitors to the exhibit will view his WWI naval portraits and be able to consult his memoir “Naval Aviator 1091 in World War I.”



Werner Neuse was born in Germany and later immigrated to the United States, became a citizen, earned his graduate degrees and joined the faculty of the Middlebury College German Department. *(Photo: Middlebury College Special Collections)*

•**Werner Neuse**, a German by birth, enlisted in the German army as a teenager shortly after his father, Richard Neuse, also a German soldier was killed. Werner Neuse later immigrated to the United States, became a citizen, earned his graduate degrees and joined the faculty of the Middlebury College German Department and helped to start the College's German summer language school. In retirement Dr. Werner Neuse translated his war memoir from German to English as well as reflections about his father contained in a second memoir describing places where he spent his youth, which cover his father's enlistment and death. The latter occurred after "he came to the front on Dec. 16, 1914, as replacement company commander. In East Prussia in the region of Schorschinen, not far from Gumbinnen. [W]Here the fatal bullet hit him on a patrol-engagement on Christmas Eve."

In time the family was advised of the location of the gravesite, In the spring of 1915, Werner and his mother traveled there and with the help of a local farmer found "the grave on one of the few hills, among other graves, with a cross in good condition on it, Father's name, rank and date of birth and death clearly carved. Mother didn't speak a word, but the next day we both went alone up there again." Visitors to the exhibit can view the Neuse family photo album with photos taken in Germany to include the gravesite and can read excerpts from Werner Neuse's two memoirs.



Karl Isaac Solomon Sterns (24 Oct 1892 - 22 Mar 1918) was a graduate of both Middlebury High School and Middlebury College, Class of 1915, and was the first Middlebury College graduate to die during the years of WWI. He was 25 years old, serving as a musician, First Class, in the U.S. Navy, on the U.S.S. Cruiser South Dakota, and died of pneumonia at Chelsea Naval Hospital in Boston, Massachusetts. Sterns had enlisted on June 29, 1917 in Burlington, Vermont. His death came just shy of his nine-month enlistment anniversary. In the spring of 1918 the first deaths later attributed to the Spanish influenza were recorded and often listed as “pneumonia” on the death certificates. This is likely the case with Karl Sterns.

As described in “FLU: The Story of the Great Influenza Pandemic of 1918 and the Search for the Virus That Caused It:” “Some almost immediately became ill, unable to get enough oxygen because their lungs had filled with fluid. They died within days, or even hours, delirious with a high fever, grasping for breath, lapsing at last into unconsciousness. In others, the illness began as an ordinary flu, with chills, fever, and muscle aches, but no untoward symptoms. By the fourth or fifth day of the illness, however, bacteria would swarm into their injured lungs and they would develop pneumonia that would either kill them or lead to a long period of convalescence.”

According to an article in the Naval History Magazine, April 2002, Vol. 16, Number 2, “There were so many patients at Chelsea Naval Hospital that tents had to be erected on the lawn to handle the overflow. Before it was over, 26 sailors in the Boston area

died from the disease.”

Sterns’ funeral service was well attended in Middlebury. Unfortunately for the family, the same week Karl Sterns’ uncle, his father’s brother, died of pneumonia in Chicago.

A Middlebury College classmate serving in the U.S. Signal Corps wrote the following tribute to Karl Sterns:

If I receive that High Command;
To march to the unknown land
If I am numbered in a squad
Detailed to fill the ranks of God;
I know more fearless I will go
Because within my heart I know,
Shoulder to shoulder in that line



“Poppies,” 2016, by Fran Bull. (Photo: Photo by Don Ross)

Will stand that dear old friend of mine.

“In Flanders Fields”

The exhibit culminates with “In Flanders Fields”, an eloquent, provocative art installation by internationally-recognized artist Fran Bull of Brandon, Vermont. Based on the WWI poem by Col. John McCrae, who taught pathology at the University of Vermont’s Medical School before the war, Fran Bull reimagines the verses as visual art. [V]Her points of departure are the skies with singing birds, fields of red poppies and white crosses, and the lamentations of corpses. Larks become bomber planes, crosses and coffins morph into formal grids. Flowers and blood-red rags stand for lost treasures and remembrance.

Central to her installation are white sculptures of Lysistrata and her female friends who promise only to grant their husbands physical intimacy when they abandon war – a concept inspired by the work of fifth-century Greek playwright Aristophanes. Another dynamic sculpture is of a pilot falling from his bombed plane –an image reminiscent of Waldo Heinrichs’ accident, but a specific incident unknown to Fran Bull when she created the installation.

“In Flanders Fields” by John McCrae, May 1915

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.
We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.
Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

"Doughboys and Flyboys" is on view at the Henry Sheldon Museum through Nov. 11.

About the Henry Sheldon Museum

The Henry Sheldon Museum in Middlebury is open Tuesday through Saturday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sundays (through Oct. 15) 1-5 p.m. Stewart-Swift Research Center is open Thursdays and Fridays from 1 to 5 p.m.

The museum is located at One Park Street, Middlebury.

To learn more: www.henrysheldonmuseum.org, 802-388-2117.

Current exhibits

"Doughboys and Flyboys: WWI Stories by Vermonters from the Home and Battlefield" features histories, photographs, posters artifacts and mementoes of locals who served in the military during World War I. Through Nov. 11.

"Waterfowl Wonders and Amusing Animals by Three Self-Taught Addison County, Vermont Carvers." Carvings by Gary Starr, Chuck Herrmann, and William Holway, through Nov. 11.

"Outdoor Sculptures by Vermont Artists Marty McGowan, John Matusz, and Warren Rinehart." Visitors to the Sheldon are greeted by three large sculptures on view in the Museum's garden. Through December 2018.

Upcoming events

Series of noon-time World War I talks. All talks are free with museum admission.

Wednesday, Oct. 10 at noon: Tim Spears, Middlebury College Vice President for Academic Development and Professor of American Studies will offer his insights regarding the changes in how our veterans are publicly honored.

Wednesday, Oct. 17 at noon: Internationally-known Brandon artist Fran Bull discusses her art installation "In Flanders Fields," on view at the Sheldon Museum, which is based on her moving artistic interpretation of the well-known poem by Canadian Lt. Col. John McCrae, M.D., who wrote the poem after witnessing a comrade blown to bits at the 1915 Battle of Ypres.

Wednesday, Oct. 24 at noon: Rebecca Bennette, associate professor of history as well as the director of Jewish Studies at Middlebury College will present "Dissent During World War One: American and British Conscientious Objection and the Strange Case of German Silence."

Wednesday, Nov. 7 at noon: Bill Lipke and Bill Mares, co-authors of "Grafting Memories: Essays on War and Commemoration" will discuss how Canadians have chosen to commemorate their veterans through paintings, photographs, sculptures, and cemeteries. A transplanted Midwesterner, Lipke is

professor emeritus of art history from the University of Vermont. Mares has been a journalist, high school teacher and member of the Vermont House of Representatives.

Sunday, Nov. 11 at 2 p.m.: Two World War I gallery talks will be presented. Robert Bernheim, professor from the University of Maine at Augusta, will address post WWI German repercussions following conditions imposed by the Treaty of Versailles, eventually leading to WWII. Brennan Gauthier, the senior archaeologist with the Vermont Department of Transportation by day, is a military photography scholar by night. He will discuss and offer images from his collection taken during or directly after the war.