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Over the Top: Denton County Soldiers in the Great War, 1917–1919

By Gregory W. Ball*

In the waning days of World War I, two Texas soldiers, Sergeant Ollie S. Calvert and Corporal Warren T. Sweeney of Company M, 142nd Infantry Regiment, 36th Division, were assigned the task of escorting eighty-seven prisoners toward the rear of the front lines. They were about one kilometer southeast of the town of St. Etienne-à-Arnes, where units of their division were attacking German forces on October 8, 1918. While escorting the prisoners away from the front, enemy artillery shells started to fall nearby, forcing the soldiers and their prisoners to take cover in a roadside ditch. As Corporal Sweeney recalled, "Sgt Calvert was sitting in a leaning position against the bank of the ditch when a large shell burst about twenty feet directly in front of us." A piece of shrapnel, "about the size of a man's thumb," struck Calvert in the chest. Sweeney heard his sergeant cry out and then Calvert was dead. When the shelling stopped and Sweeney was able to continue escorting the prisoners from the front, Calvert's body had to be left in the ditch. Sweeney later reported that he did not know the location of Calvert's grave.[1]

Before the war, Calvert worked on a farm near the town of Justin in Denton County, Texas, and Sweeney farmed near Pilot Point in the same county. Both were in their early to mid twenties when they entered military service. They were two of the nearly 200,000 Texans who served during World War I and contributed to bringing the war to a victorious close for the Allies a little more than a year after the United States entered the conflict. Curiously, however, their stories and those of other Texans

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[1] Chaplain C. H. Barnes, *History of the 142nd Infantry of the 36th Division, October 15, 1917 to June 17, 1919* (n.p.: Blackwell Job Printing Company, 1922), 160 (quotation); Ollie S. Calvert was awarded the French Croix de Guerre posthumously; see *Denton Record-Chronicle*, Aug. 2, 1919. The age of the soldiers was determined from draft registration cards, Selective Service Registration Cards for World War I, M1509, Texas, reels TX 43–45 (microfilm: National Archives and Records Administration, Southwest Branch, Fort Worth, Texas).

in what was then called the Great War are not well remembered. Texans have a great military tradition that is much celebrated in accounts of the Texas Revolution, the U.S.-Mexican War, Civil War, and World War II, but the role of Texas and Texans in World War I has not been adequately studied.

For example, in the wide ranging collection of essays edited by Joseph G. Dawson, *The Texas Military Experience from the Texas Revolution through World War II*, the military service of World War I Texans receives only the briefest mention: Martin Blumenson's essay on the 36th Infantry Division in World War II spends three paragraphs describing the unit's World War I service. The recent *Twentieth-Century Texas: A Social and Cultural History*, edited by John W. Storey and Mary L. Kelley, includes an essay by Ralph Wooster, "Over Here: Texans on the Home Front," in which the author provides a longer, but still not comprehensive survey of how World War I influenced Texans at home.[2]

This is not to say that World War I in Texas has been completely overlooked. Wooster's recent *Texas and Texans in the Great War* provides a much needed overview of the period, while historian José Ramírez ably chronicles the experiences of Mexican Americans in World War I in *To the Line of Fire: Mexican Texans and World War I.* Lonnie J. White has offered histories of the 36th and 90th divisions, and earlier histories also exist for the two divisions.[3] However, the study of Texas and World War I still has much to offer historians. The military, social, and cultural aspects of this subject can be explored through a detailed examination of soldiers' experiences in joining the service as draftees or volunteers, their training in Texas, their journey to the front, their combat service, and their return home. Who were these soldiers, and how did they experience the Great War? This study seeks to broaden knowledge of this lesser known aspect of Texas history by analyzing a single company of soldiers who volunteered for service in Denton County in 1917.

On March 29, 1917, a little more than a week before the United States entered World War I, the mayor of Denton, Sam G. Gary, placed "A Call to All Americans" in the *Denton Record-Chronicle* in which he "earnestly requested" the citizens of the town to meet at the county courthouse on

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[2] Joseph G. Dawson (ed.), *The Texas Military Experience: From the Texas Revolution through World War II* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1995); John W. Storey and Mary L. Kelley (eds.), *Twentieth-Century Texas: A Social and Cultural History* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2008).

[3] Ralph A. Wooster, *Texas and Texans in the Great War* (Buffalo Gap, Tex.: State House Press, 2010); José A. Ramírez, *To the Line of Fire: Mexican Texans and World War I* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2009); Lonnie J. White, *Panthers to Arrowheads: The 36th (Texas-Oklahoma) Division in World War I* (Austin: The Presidial Press, 1984); Lonnie J. White, *The 90th Division in World War I* (Manhattan, Kans.: Sunflower Press, 1996); Ben H. Chastaine, *Story of the Thirty-Sixth: The Experiences of the Thirty-Sixth Division in the World War* (Oklahoma City: Harlow, 1920), Major George Wythe, *A History of the 90th Division* (n.p.: Ninetieth Division Association,1920); Bernice Blanche Miller Maxfield and William E. Jary Jr., *Camp Bowie, Fort Worth, 1917–1918, An Illustrated History of the 36th Division in the First World War* (Fort Worth: B. B. Maxfield Foundation, 1975).

April 5, "for the purpose of reaffirming our allegiance to the principles of freedom and liberty as handed down to us by our fathers." Each man and woman was urged to attend the meeting so that by their presence they would be endorsing "the course of our nation in this time of grave impact."[4] The *Record-Chronicle* estimated that between seven and eight thousand people filled the courthouse square for the meeting. Nearly half the crowd comprised students from the nearby normal college and the local public schools. The students from the college marched four abreast down Oak Street, led by their band and a student waving a large American flag. A crowd of school children gathered on the south lawn of the courthouse and sang "The Red, White, and Blue" followed by "The Star Spangled Banner," while the students waved their flags in time to the singing and music. The meeting clearly indicated the overall feeling of the citizens of the county: the next day, Congress declared war.[5]

While the nation began war preparations, President Woodrow Wilson had determined that a draft was the only sure way to rapidly increase the size of the army. June 5, 1917, was draft registration day; every man between the ages of twenty-one and thirty was required to register. The registration centers in Denton County—four in Denton and thirty-one elsewhere—were open from 7:00 a.m. until 9:00 p.m. Registration went smoothly, and when the preliminary results were examined, Denton County had registered 3,042 men, slightly less than 10 percent of the county's population. However, 1,877 of the registrants (62 percent) claimed exemption from military service for various reasons, primarily because of dependents. Although this suggests Denton County men were not eager to be drafted, it does not mean that all men were opposed to volunteering.[6] And many Denton County men did in fact volunteer for military service by joining the Texas National Guard.

Debate raged on both the national and local levels of the value of conscription as opposed to volunteering, and a frequent criticism voiced by opponents of the draft was that soldiers would serve with strangers far from home and in less than ideal circumstances. The Texas National Guard played up this point in its recruiting efforts by asking questions such as "Who will be your tentmate? During the long hours in training camp and on the battlefields, will your friend or a stranger share your bivouac?" The Texas National Guard claimed that the "young men of Texas can determine this for themselves during the next few weeks. After that, no one can tell to what regiment they will be assigned." Furthermore, the National Guard hinted that "not only will the recruit who joins the National Guard have the benefit of association with friends and be

[4] *Denton Record-Chronicle*, Mar. 29, 1917.

[5] *Denton Record-Chronicle*, Apr. 6, 1917.

[6] *Denton Record-Chronicle*, June 4, 5, 6, 7, 1917.

commanded by an officer from his home, but the chance of promotion seems most promising."[7]

On June 4, 1917, the day before draft registration, the Texas National Guard announced that four new infantry regiments would be raised and new companies would be formed to bring these regiments to full strength. Denton was among a number of cities suggested as locations to raise these National Guard companies.[8] On June 28, 1917, the organization of a National Guard Company in Denton was confirmed by Brigadier General John Hulen, with Captain Noah Roark appointed as the commanding officer of Company M, Seventh Texas Infantry. Roark immediately opened a recruiting office on the courthouse square, and set about his task of recruiting soldiers. He would need well more than 100 volunteers just to activate the company.[9]

Although Captain Roark had only thirty-three recruits in late June, he signed up nearly seventy recruits by July 2. His efforts were likely boosted by the "patriotic meeting" the city held on the east lawn of the courthouse in order to stimulate more interest in joining the company. Captain Roark was invited to speak and again touched on the advantages of joining a local unit. He commented that "every man will be with home folks . . . every letter will be a letter to the entire unit, and all the officers, from the highest to the lowest in the company will be Denton County and North Texas men."[10] Roark and one of his officers, Lt. James B. Stiff, spent several more weeks in their recruiting efforts. Roark spoke at the "picture show" and traveled to various towns in the county, including Krum, Sanger, and Bolivar. Roark was well aware that time was running out for bringing the

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[7] *Denton Record-Chronicle*, June 13, 1917 (quotations). Texas Congressman Jeff McLemore forwarded a petition from Denton County citizens who protested against conscription to the Committee on Military Affairs, see U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1917), 65th Cong., 1st sess., 1917, vol. 55, pt. 1, p. 666.

[8] *Denton Record-Chronicle*, June 4, June 7, 1917. The National Guard was meant to be the "primary reserve" of the Army, according to the National Defense Act of 1916. It could be expanded with volunteers to raise its strength to 450,000. The key difference, as John Whiteclay Chambers pointed out, was that the president was "empowered to *draft* the National Guard—the organized militia—directly into federal service in time of war or other national emergency (italics in original)"; Chambers, *To Raise an Army: The Draft Comes to Modern America* (New York: Free Press, 1987), 117. The Texas National Guard consisted of two brigades. The First Infantry Brigade consisted of the Second, Third, and Fourth infantry regiments, while the Second Brigade consisted of the First, Fifth, and Sixth infantry regiments. The Seventh would be a new regiment recruited from the Panhandle and northwestern Texas; see Alexander White Spence, "Services of the 36th Division with the American Expeditionary Forces, 1918–1919" (typescript, 1919), 1–3, Records of the American Expeditionary Forces, 36th Division, Record Group 120 (National Archives).

[9] Denton County's draft quota was reported by the *Record-Chronicle* to be 245 men. In order to meet this requirement, 490 men were called for physicals; see *Denton Record-Chronicle*, July 25, 1917. Noah Roark was an interesting individual. He was born in Denton and worked as a reporter for the *Record-Chronicle* until he was admitted to the bar in 1902. Roark eventually moved to Dallas in 1910 and served as assistant district attorney before returning to Denton to raise the National Guard Company. After the war, in 1933, Roark shot and killed a man over an argument about office rent and spent seven years in prison. He died in Dallas at age 73 in 1952; see *Dallas Morning News*, Aug. 15, 1952.

[10] *Denton Record-Chronicle*, June 30, July 2, 1917 (quotation).

company up to full strength; General Hulen had announced that July 10, 1917, would be the cut-off point for voluntary enlistments in the National Guard so as not to interfere with the upcoming draft. By July 7, Roark had enlisted more than ninety men, declaring that his efforts were successful and activation of the company was a "foregone conclusion."[11]

By July 23, after physical examinations had been conducted, Roark and 135 men left the armory on the courthouse square and marched toward a new camp on the western edge of Denton named Camp Beyette in honor of the new mayor of Denton, P. J. Beyette. Once in camp, the men immediately began training. Indicative of the state of American national military preparedness, not everything ran smoothly. There was a shortage of equipment, supplies, and uniforms. On their first night in camp, for example, Captain Roark announced that "all who can get them will take comforts and blankets, and those who can't, will sleep on the ground or as best they can." The next day, the company was mustered into the service of the Texas National Guard, with about two weeks to prepare for a final inspection before being brought into federal service, scheduled for August 5, 1917. Captain Roark then appealed to the citizens of Denton County for help, and the county responded quickly with blankets and other "comforts." As the two weeks went by, the *Record-Chronicle* reported that the men seemed "well satisfied with their soldier life thus far and are rapidly being drilled in shape for Federal inspection." This included marches to and from the business section of town in order to toughen the men's feet.[12]

Once the divisional training camps were ready for the new soldiers, Captain Roark and his officers began preparations for the roughly forty mile trip to Camp Bowie, which lay just to the southwest of Fort Worth, and where units that would eventually compose the 36th Division were consolidating. Orders to move had come in early September, almost at the same time that Denton's first quota of draftees departed for Camp Travis in San Antonio. According to the *Record-Chronicle*, the former guardsmen left Denton at 3:30 a.m. on a special train for Camp Bowie "to begin intensive military training and to do their 'bit' in whipping the Kaiser." The train carrying Company M also had soldiers from "Paris, Sherman, Bonham and Whitesboro . . . and Denton residents were given an initiation to the battle cries of the different companies."[13]

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[11] *Denton Record-Chronicle*, July 5, 7, 1917; Roark was given more time to recruit as General Hulen pushed the deadline back to July 23, 1917, upon hearing the draft was delayed; see *Denton Record-Chronicle*, July 16, 1917.

[12] *Denton Record-Chronicle*, July 23 (1st quotation), 24, 25 (2nd quotation), and Aug. 2, 4, 6, 1917; The actual war strength of Company M was set at 150 men and recruiting was allowed to continue while the men were in camp after the draft had taken place, see *Denton Record-Chronicle*, July 30, 1917. P. J. Beyette was elected mayor of Denton in May of 1917 after Sam G. Gary resigned his position; see *Denton Record-Chronicle*, May 23, 1917.

[13] *Denton Record-Chronicle*, Sept. 3, 7, 1917.

Once at Camp Bowie the Seventh Texas Infantry was combined with the First Oklahoma Infantry to become the 142nd Infantry Regiment of the 36th Division, known as the "Lone Star" or "Panther" Division. The consolidation of various Texas and Oklahoma units caused considerable distress among the officers and men, although they could do little about it. After the reorganization, Company M remained in Camp Bowie, undergoing training for combat. The training consisted of a wide range of activities, including marksmanship, trench warfare, gas training, and instruction in the use of mortars. Unfortunately, tragedy struck the 142nd during its training when a mortar shell exploded prematurely, killing eleven men. Private Archibald Hart was nearby when the tragedy occurred and narrowly missed being killed: "I ducked—a good three seconds late—and grinned foolishly at my delayed reaction as I stood erect and looked around." Then he noticed one of his fellow soldiers "two paces to my right and slightly to the rear," lying in a pool of blood, a "gaping hole under his jaw." There were also lighter moments, such as when a group of soldiers from the regiment were undergoing gas training and were required to wear their masks all day. At about 2:00 p.m., a captain took some of his soldiers behind a group of trees to let them take off their masks for a "breather." The men were surprised by the sudden appearance of a colonel, who relieved the captain on the spot and made the men put their masks back on for the remainder of the day. This training, including long hikes around the area, continued until the summer of 1918, when the division embarked for France, arriving in Europe in June 1918. As the soldiers of the division approached the shore one member of the regiment, Archibald Hart, "silently exulted, 'Ah, a foreign country. I'm now in a foreign country.'"[14] Upon arriving in France, they went to the infantry training area near the town of Bar-sur-Aube.

In September 1918, the 36th Division, including Company M, was moved by railroad to near the French town of Champignuel, where they

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[14] Barnes, *History of the 142nd Infantry of the 36th Division*, 244; This reorganization also occurred in order to have American units conform to standard European units, as recommended by General John J. Pershing; see *Denton Record-Chronicle,* Aug. 17, 1917. Unfortunately, neither Captain Noah Roark nor fellow Denton officer Lt. Clark Owsley were able to stay with the company. It appears that Roark failed his medical exam prior to deploying overseas; see *Denton Record-Chronicle*, Aug. 4, 1919; Card File for Noah Roark (Texas Military Forces Museum, Austin, Texas); Discharge Records for Noah Roark, Volume 1 (Office of the County Clerk, Denton County Courthouse, Denton, Texas). Clark Owsley was transferred; see Discharge Records, Volume 1 (Office of the County Clerk, Denton County Courthouse). When Company M went into the line in 1918, its officers were Oscar L. Baker, Young Yates, Verne Hillock, Robert Moses, and George Goeble. Baker, Yates, Hillock, and Moses were all from Texas. Goeble was from Michigan; see Barnes, *History of the 142nd Infantry of the 36th Division*, 346. The casualties from the mortar explosion from White, *Panthers to Arrowheads*, 64, and the gas mask story is from George Lloyd White, World War I Questionnaire, 142nd Infantry, 36th Division (United States Army Education and Heritage Center, Carlisle, Pa). The quotation from Archibald Hart is in Hart, *Company K of Yesterday* (New York: Vantage, 1969), 36, 48. The analysis of the members of the company is based on the composition of the company before it left Denton, and not after it was combined with Company K of Fort Worth. For details about the reorganization of the regiments, see White, *Panthers to Arrowheads*, 33–36, and Spence, "Services of the 36th Division with the American Expeditionary Forces" (typescript), 11.

served a little over a month as part of the French Fourth Army in or near the front lines and participated in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, capturing the town of St. Etienne and Forest Farm in the process. As one member of the company wrote, "we got the word that we were going up where the big show was going on. Well, we were loaded in French autos and carried to the outskirts of a big city, there we could hear the roar of the big guns and even see them flash." As evening approached, the soldiers stopped, ate a meal of canned salmon and bread and "dumped our equipment and got our reserve rations." Another member of the regiment had a more chilling experience. Lt. Edwin Sayles received a meal of cold beans on a thick slice of bread and coffee. He sat down to eat, leaning his back against something until another officer pointed out that he was leaning against a dead French soldier. Sayles remembered that the man's face and hands were as blue as his uniform. Unfortunately, their efforts to relieve the American Second Division were complicated because the guides lost their way and the 142nd was not in place until late in the evening, just hours before their first scheduled attack on October 8, 1918. During the assault, Private Bryan P. Autrey, a runner from regimental headquarters, recalled that "several of my best friends were shot down by my side and several more wounded." Autrey continued in the fighting for two days before receiving "a lucky hit" that "saved me from being blown into bits of almost nothing." Barney Ervin Williams recalled years later that his company went "over the top" with 178 "good young men" but the next day could only muster 37. During their time in combat, the regiment had 172 men killed, 35 of whom later died of wounds, and 795 wounded, the majority occurring during the Battle of St. Etienne on October 8, 1918. Company M lost nine men killed in the fighting, including Denton County residents Ollie S. Calvert, Arthur O. McNitzky, Willis Goodger, Will Curtis, and Roy C. King. For their actions in France, three members of the company were awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.[15]

Company M remained in the front lines or near them until the armistice of November 11, 1918. Shortly before this, one member of the company, Clifford Young, wrote to his parents that he had just returned from the front. Telling them he had spent twenty-three days in the lines, he wrote,

[15] Barnes, *History of the 142nd Infantry of the 36th Division,* 32, 30, 184–185; American Battle Monument Commission, *36th Division, Summary of Operations in the World War* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1944), 19; Volume 1, pp. 238–239, and Volume 4, pp. 237, 238 (all quotations except Williams's), William Deming Hornaday Transcripts of World War I (Archives Division, Texas State Library, Austin); Edwin Sayles, "A Quiet Sector: From Somme-Py and Back" (unpublished manuscript), Edwin B. Sayles Papers, 1892–1975, and undated military activities folder, Literary Productions, 1918 (Southwest Collection, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas); Barney Ervin Williams, World War I Questionnaire (4th quotation), 142nd Infantry Regiment, 36th Division. According to the *Denton Record-Chronicle*, Curtis was reported as also having received a posthumous award of the French Croix de Guerre; see *Denton Record-Chronicle*, Aug. 2, 1919. The award for Curtis read, "While passing through a heavy enemy barrage, Pvt. Curtis was mortally wounded, but continued to advance, encouraging his comrades to follow him"; *Denton Record-Chronicle,* July 31, 1919.

"you can guess how I felt without washing or pulling off my clothes and no sleep or rest. I went over the top twice, but thank God I never got a scratch." He concluded his letter by telling his parents that "I am a crack shot at these Huns [it] sure is some style of hunting game."[16] After the armistice, the unit held a memorial service for those killed that was led by the regimental chaplain. Later in November, the 142nd was pulled back towards Le Mans and then sent near Yonnes, France, about 120 miles southeast of Paris, where they stayed until April 1919. By May, they were at the port of Brest. On May 19, Company M and the 142nd Infantry boarded the troopship *Pueblo* for the trip home. The *Pueblo* arrived in New York City on May 31, 1919, where the men disembarked and were taken to Camp Merritt, New Jersey. They remained there until the middle of June, when they boarded trains that took them on the last leg of their journey home, passing through Oklahoma and then on to Camp Bowie.[17]

The majority of Company M received their discharges, along with a train ticket home and a sixty dollar bonus on June 17, 1919, and many of the Denton County men hoped to catch the afternoon train that same day. Unfortunately, a train derailment prevented most of the former soldiers from getting to Denton on the evening of the 17th, although some enterprising soldiers hired a private car to drive them from Camp Bowie to Denton. Although the men were eager to get home, they also had another task to accomplish. Private Ernest Boggs, who had returned to Denton early because of wounds he received in combat, had not received his French Croix de Guerre. The returning members of the company met Boggs on the south side of the courthouse and in a simple ceremony, read his citation for the award and pinned the medal to his chest. The Denton County soldiers were home at last.[18]

Company M initially consisted of three officers, eleven sergeants, sixteen corporals, one hundred eighteen privates, and seven cooks, mechanics, and musicians. No data were found for nineteen members of the company. Nineteen percent of the company filled leadership positions (officers, sergeants, and corporals) while 81 percent were privates. A total of seven Denton County men (5 percent) were killed while serving with the company, five in combat and two in accidents. The small number of fatalities was due to the fact Company M did not see extended combat in France. This is not to say, however, that their time on the front was

[16] Volume 1, p. 298, William Deming Hornaday Transcripts of World War I.

[17] Barnes, *History of the 142nd Infantry of the 36th Division*, 44, 48; Volume 2, p. 256, William Deming Hornaday Transcripts of World War I. Conditions after the armistice were apparently good for Company M and the 142nd, as the division was billeted in "French houses or in wooden barracks," with good food and opportunities to take tours of France, England, Belgium, and Italy; see Volume 2, pp. 255–256, William Deming Hornaday Transcripts of World War I. On the second day at sea, the regiment encountered rough seas that swept two men overboard. Both drowned. Neither man was from Company M; see Barnes, *History of the 142nd Infantry of the 36th Division*, 49–50, and 51–55.

[18] *Denton Record-Chronicle*, June 17, 18, 1919; Discharge Records, Volume I (County Clerk's Office, Denton County Courthouse).

anything but arduous; fourteen men (9 percent) were also wounded in action.[19]

Company M was only one of many National Guard companies raised across Texas. The Seventh Texas Infantry Regiment, of which Company M was originally a part, pulled together Texas National Guard companies from a number of areas stretching from Cleburne to Amarillo, south to Lubbock, and back to Abilene and Fort Worth. An examination of where the men of this company were born and where they were living at the time they volunteered suggests the fluid nature of American society in the early twentieth-century. For example, just thirty-two men (21 percent) in the company were actually born in the city of Denton. An additional 12 percent were born in the small farming communities of Denton County. Combined, these men accounted for just 33 percent, or one-third of the company.[20]

By far, the largest number of men, sixty-four (41 percent), were born in other parts of Texas. Some were born in neighboring Collin or Wise counties, and others came from Erath and Hunt counties. Several were from surrounding cities such as Dallas and Weatherford, and one came from as far away as Houston. Nineteen members of the company were born outside of Texas (12 percent), all from southern states except Massachusetts and South Dakota. Finally, based on the ninety-two draft registration cards found for members of the company, all were native-born. This lack of foreign born soldiers in one company, however, cannot be extended to represent the entire division, which had soldiers of many nationalities, including men of French, Italian, Filipino, Danish, Assyrian, Indian, Chinese, and Turkish descent, among others. Furthermore, although Company M comprised exclusively white soldiers, it should be borne in mind that the 36th Division contained a number of Mexican soldiers and nearly 600 Native Americans, most of who served in the 142nd, of which Company M was a part.[21]

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[19] Two of the seven deaths were non-combat and occurred in the United States. Vuie Maxwell was killed accidentally by a train while he was home on leave from Camp Bowie, and Harry Powell died in April 1918 of unknown causes; see *Denton Record-Chronicle* and Texas Participation in World War I-Lists of World War I Dead, C–E, 36th Division Association Papers, 1984/142 (Archives Division, Texas State Library, Austin); A list of Denton County soldiers wounded in action was printed in the *Denton Record-Chronicle* "Victory Edition" of July 31, 1919.

[20] Other companies that were sent to Camp Bowie and mustered into the 142nd Infantry Regiment included a headquarters company from Crowell; a machine-gun company from Gainesville; a supply company from Lubbock, and infantry companies from Amarillo, Clarendon, Childress, Quanah, Vernon, Decatur, Abilene, Fort Worth, Cleburne, and two companies from Wichita Falls. See Barnes, *History of the 142nd Infantry of the 36th Division*, 218–243.

[21] Selective Service Registration Cards for World War I, M1509, Texas, reels TX 43–45 (microfilm); White, *Panthers to Arrowheads*, 43–46. For a discussion of foreign-born soldiers, see Nancy Gentile Ford, *Americans All! Foreign-Born Soldiers in World War I* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001); for American Indians in World War I, see Thomas A. Britten, *American Indians in World War I: At War and at Home* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997); for Mexican American soldiers, see Ramírez, *To the Line of Fire. Mexican Texans and World War I.*

Even if the majority of the soldiers were not born in Denton or Denton County, the vast majority lived within the county in 1917. Sixty-eight men (44 percent) lived in the city of Denton when they joined the company. The next largest group of men came from Pilot Point, a dozen miles to the northeast of Denton, representing twelve men (8 percent). The small farming towns of Justin, Sanger, and Aubrey each sent eight men, accounting for 15 percent of the company. The town of Garza (now Lake Dallas) followed closely with seven men, Krum contributed five, while Ponder, Lewisville, and Argyle sent two each. Twelve more soldiers (8 percent) joined from other areas within Denton County. Thus, nearly 70 percent of the soldiers from Company M lived within the county at the time they volunteered for service. Because Denton was an agricultural community, the assumption might be made that the soldiers of Company M were mainly farmers. While there is some truth to this assumption, it is not entirely accurate, as a wide variation in economic pursuits was found, particularly among the officers.[22]

Two of the three officers in the company were lawyers. Of the non-commissioned officers, only four of the twenty-seven (15 percent) sergeants and corporals claimed farming as their main occupation. One sergeant, John S. Clark, was described as a laborer. For the most part, however, the non-commissioned officers held positions as skilled or clerical workers, although mess sergeant A. O. McNitzky listed his civilian occupation as pool hall employee. Two of the non-commissioned officers, First Sergeant Don E. West and Sergeant Grover C. Graham described themselves as managers, while other non-commissioned officers worked as a salesman, a school teacher, a student, an automobile mechanic, clerks, a carpenter, and a collector. Thus, at this level, the assumption that the company was composed of agricultural workers does not hold true.[23]

The assumption does prove largely accurate for the rest of the company, however. Farming was a key occupation for many of the men in Company M. Thirty-four privates (27 percent) listed farming or farm laborer as their occupation when they registered for the draft, which mirrors the findings of White, who estimated one-third of the Camp Bowie soldiers were farmers, although he stated that "no figures are available" to support his impressions. The second largest grouping of occupations was described as "laborer," which fourteen men listed (11 percent). Among those not engaged in agricultural pursuits, Roy N. Allen worked as an automobile mechanic, George Amen worked as a machinist, two men worked as printers, and Clyde Graves worked as a confectionary. Although there were a wide variety of occupations in the company, commissioned

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[22] Selective Service Registration Cards for World War I, M1509, Texas, reels TX 43–45 (microfilm).

[23] Ibid. This finding is in line with White's brief discussion of the officers of the division; see White, *Panthers to Arrowheads*, 13–15.

and non-commissioned officers tended toward skilled occupations, while the privates generally engaged in unskilled work when employment was examined through the organizational structure of the unit.[24]

On the other hand, distinction between officers and privates cannot be found when examining marital status and the number of dependents that the soldiers of Company M claimed. The overwhelming majority of the Denton County soldiers studied (97 percent) were not married; the available data indicate that only three were. One of these was the company commander, Noah Roark. The other two married men were privates. Therefore, with only three men in the company married, it is plausible to suggest that a majority of Texas soldiers who volunteered for military service in World War I, were unmarried not just those from Denton County.[25] Just because a man was unmarried, however, does not mean that he had fewer family responsibilities. Including the two married men previously mentioned there were fifteen soldiers (10 percent) who claimed dependents, twelve of whom claimed parents or siblings. Thus, while the majority of Company M soldiers were unmarried, it does not mean that they had less responsibility for others than those who were married. On the other hand, having dependents appeared to be a strong reason for a man to request an exemption from the draft. This held true not only across the county, but in Company M as well.[26]

Seventeen men (11 percent) of the company requested exemptions when registering for the draft. Of the fifteen men with dependents, five soldiers did not request an exemption because of their dependents, but ten did. Seven other soldiers, however, requested exemptions for other reasons. Three men requested exemptions for farming. One man, Wylie Baze, requested an exemption for religious reasons. The final three requests for exemption were for medical reasons and included one who was hard of hearing, one for rheumatism, and one for physical disqualification.[27]

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[24] Ibid; White, *Panthers to Arrowheads*, 45–46. White also noted a range of interesting occupations across the division, such as one man who was a violinist and one who was a movie star.

[25] Selective Service Registration Cards for World War I, M1509, Texas, reels TX 43–45 (microfilm). According to White, "a seemingly high percentage of officers, presumably because they were older men, were already married," as were draftees who were later brought into the division, but not the original men who volunteered. Thus, the analysis of this study supports White's assertion; see *Panthers to Arrowheads*, 48–49.

[26] Selective Service Registration Cards for World War I, M1509, Texas, reels TX 43–45 (microfilm).

[27] Selective Service Registration Cards for Lloyd Price, Guy Swisher, and Homer Klepper, M1509, Texas, reels TX 43–45 (microfilm). Homer B. Klepper, who requested an exemption from the draft because of "physical disqualification," was able to join Company M. Although it is unknown why he decided to join the company, he was medically discharged in September 1917 with a number of other men from the company after their arrival at Camp Bowie in Fort Worth. Did he join out of fear of being drafted or was there another reason? Unfortunately, we will never know. Additionally, although agriculture had strong interest groups lobbying for exemptions of farm workers, in the summer of 1917 local draft boards were "reluctant to recognize particular individuals as being indispensable to the economy"; however, many boards were willing to grant exemptions for married men and men with dependents. See Chambers, *To Raise an Army*, 188.

Why did these men who requested exemptions from the draft volunteer for the Texas National Guard? There are several possible explanations. Some may have felt pressure from family members to volunteer, while others may have simply felt it was their duty.[28]

Furthermore, one of the reasons men joined the National Guard rather than the regular army was they had been told they would serve with friends and be commanded by officers they knew. How true was this? One way to determine this is to examine the number of men who stayed with the company from its formation in Denton all the way through combat. Of the 155 men in the company, only 34 (22 percent) remained with Company M as it transitioned from the National Guard to the Army and then all the way through training and combat. Despite the rhetoric of the recruiters, there were no guarantees. Almost half the company, seventy-six soldiers (49 percent), did not finish the war with Company M. Medical reasons were the largest factor. In mid-September of 1917, the men in Company M underwent physicals at Camp Bowie for induction into the regular army. Thirty-one soldiers (41 percent) failed either this physical or a later one and were discharged. Military service for these men ended quickly. Some of these men did, however, register for the second and third registrations periods in 1917 and 1918, and some would eventually serve with other units, but for most their service with Company M had ended practically before it started.[29] Another forty-one soldiers who joined in Denton failed to stay with the company, but for non-medical reasons. Transfers represented the largest share of the men (54 percent) who did not remain with the company. Of those men who left Company M for reasons besides medical disqualifications or through transfers, three were selected to receive commissions. Another soldier, Lonnie Patman, was found to be underage and discharged.[30]

Wars, of course, are fought by young men. The average age of the soldiers of Company M was twenty-two. The company commander, Noah Roark, at thirty-eight, was the oldest, while several soldiers shared the distinction

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[28] Veterans of the 142nd for the most part listed patriotic reasons for joining, such as George Lloyd White, who enlisted out of "patriotism," Barney Ervin Williams, who believed it was his duty, and Lloyd Edward Whitman, who "wanted to serve." World War I Questionnaires, 142nd Infantry Regiment, 36th Division.

[29] Military Card File of Texas World War I Soldiers (Texas Military Forces Museum, Austin, Texas); The *Denton Record-Chronicle* reported that twenty-eight men failed this first physical at Camp Bowie. The men returned to Denton shortly afterward, see *Denton Record-Chronicle,* Sept. 17, 19, 1917.

[30] Barnes, *History of the 142nd Infantry of the 36th Division*, 181; Military Card File of Texas World War I Soldiers. Although Lilliard H. Ligon left the company to get his commission, First Sergeant Don E. West stayed with the company, perhaps receiving a battlefield promotion along with Private Lewis Harrell. Both West and Harrell were listed by Barnes as First Lieutenants of Company M; see Barnes, *History of the 142nd Infantry of the 36th Division*, 181. Company M also received transfers into the company. One transfer, Adolph Windel, wrote to a relative that "I have been transferred to Company M, 142d Regiment. This regiment did more fighting and has a better record than my former regiment; hence I am proud of the transfer." See Volume 6, p. 242, William Deming Hornaday Transcripts of World War I.

of being the youngest members of the company at eighteen. Among the company leadership, defined as the officers, the first sergeant, the supply sergeant, and the mess sergeant, the average age was twenty-seven. Thus, these men not only all had prior military service, but they had more life experience than the majority of the company. Of the eight other sergeants in the company, however, the average age was only twenty-two years of age. Of these eight men, four had prior military service and four did not. The four who had no previous military experience must have shown strong leadership potential to be put in these positions when they were the same age or younger than the majority of the men they were going to lead. As for the privates, the age breakdown was slightly different.[31] Twenty-nine soldiers (19 percent) were under twenty-one years of age, seventy-seven of the soldiers (50 percent) were twenty-one to twenty-five years old, and seventeen members of the company (11 percent) were twenty-six or older. Thus, the vast majority of the soldiers of Company M were in their early twenties, and their officers were slightly older with prior military service. Men who were older than twenty-five were much less likely, it appeared, to voluntarily join the military, while those who were less than twenty-one might have been held back for other reasons, such as their parents. Perhaps because the majority of the company was between the ages of twenty-one and twenty-five, this group also requested the largest number of exemptions, a total of twelve. Surprisingly, only two of the soldiers aged twenty-six or older requested exemptions and both were married with dependents. Fifteen members of this group, who appeared to be less likely to volunteer because of their age, did volunteer. Perhaps these older soldiers considered their decision more carefully, or perhaps they simply had bought into the idea that they would be better off serving in a local company.[32]

As one historian has written, "If we were to try to describe the quintessential doughboy, we would probably end up with a white man in his early twenties, having little education and no previous military experience. If he was lucky, he received six months training in the United States and then two months in France." Although this statement masks the considerable diversity of American soldiers who served in World War I, it is a fairly accurate depiction of Company M. Most of these soldiers were in their early twenties, and most held jobs as farmers or laborers, although some worked in skilled occupations. The majority of these men were not married, although more had dependents than might be expected. The overwhelming majority did not have prior military experience while

[31] Selective Service Registration Cards for World War I, M1509, Texas, reels TX 43–45 (microfilm).

[32] Ibid. This analysis of the soldiers' ages supports White's comment that "One reading the sources is left with the distinct impression that the large majority of men were in their early and middle twenties"; White, *Panthers to Arrowheads*, 47.

those who did usually filled positions of leadership. Although there were differences between the officers and enlisted men, one thing each shared when it came to service in a National Guard company was that few of them would stay with the same unit throughout the war, which was an ironic fact considering that many of them may have volunteered for such service rather than waiting to be drafted in order to stay with the same unit.[33]

The extent to which the soldiers of Company M were typical of Texas soldiers in World War I cannot be stated with certainty until similar research is completed on a sizable number of companies from around the state. However, this study shows that the sources are available to undertake the sort of detailed profiling of Texas soldiers that will reveal what kinds of men typically entered the service and what happened to them while serving. Future studies of Texas soldiers should also include draftees, African Americans, and foreign-born soldiers. The result will be an enhanced understanding of Texas society in the early twentieth century as well as what the Great War meant to thousands of Texans.[34]

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[33] Gary Mead, *The Doughboys: America and the First World War* (New York: Overlook Press, 2000), 73. Unfortunately, other historians fail to provide a composite image of the American Soldier in World War I. For example, recent works such as Jennifer Keene, *Doughboys, the Great War, and the Remaking of America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), John S. D. Eisenhower, *Yanks* (New York: Free Press, 2001), and James H. Hallas (ed.), *Doughboy War: The American Expeditionary Force in World War I* (Mechanicsburg, Penn.: Stackpole Books, 2009), do not attempt a description of a typical soldier. Keene focuses on the relationship between soldiers and the Army, Eisenhower focuses strictly on military events in France, and Hallas's work is a collection of oral histories with no analysis.

[34] According to Laurence Stallings, American soldiers in World War I received the name Doughboys because of their service on the Texas border. They were "powdered white with the dust of adobe soil and hence were called 'adobes' by mounted troops." From there, they became "Dobies" and eventually Doughboys; see Laurence Stallings, *The Doughboys: the Story of the AEF, 1917–1918* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 5.