

Corporal Harry Friel
“C” Company 315th Infantry Regiment United States Army
By David Friel, his nephew

Harry Friel appears on the Alexandria Cenotaph as Harry “Freel” so finding out anything about him was always likely to be a bit of a challenge. David Friel from Tullichewan has solved the problem and we’re thankful to him for providing the web-site with this account of his uncle, Corporal Harry Friel of the 315th Infantry Regiment of the United States Army.

David’s late cousin, John, was the source of an article in the Lennox Herald in November 2009 which we attach at the end of this article, and from which the family photos have been taken. Together they give as full a picture as we’re likely to get of the war-time experiences of Harry and the troubles which his family had to endure as they tried to find out what happened to him. His story is the first one which we have of a local man serving in the United States Army in WW1 and while its no surprise that his battlefield experiences were much the same as soldiers serving with the BEF, the treatment of his family as they tried to find out what had happened to Harry is a shock. With all its resources and with its pride in the care of its military veterans from the early 19th century onwards, we expected better from the US Army.



Harry Friel’s parents had come over to Scotland in the aftermath of the Irish Potato Famine and settled in the Vale. Henry (Harry) Friel was born on 13 November 1888 at 1 Albert Street Alexandria, one of nine children of Patrick Friel and his wife Catherine (nee Donnelly). Three of Harry’s brothers, Pat, James and John would go on to fight in World War 1 and, happily, they all survived. The photograph of Harry’s parents with his 3 brothers was doctored by the addition of Harry’s photo in US Army uniform, because the family did not get together during WW1.



BROTHERS IN ARMS: Pat, Jimmy, John and Harry Freel along with their parents.

In June 1911 Harry travelled to the USA, sailing from Glasgow to Boston where he gave his final destination as Philadelphia. Apart from a trip home between December 1913 and April 1914, he appears to have settled in Philadelphia where he worked as a plasterer. In 1917 Harry registered for the military draft and in 1918 he married Anna Eva Magregor, became a naturalized citizen and joined "C" Company of the 315th Infantry Regiment of the United States Army.

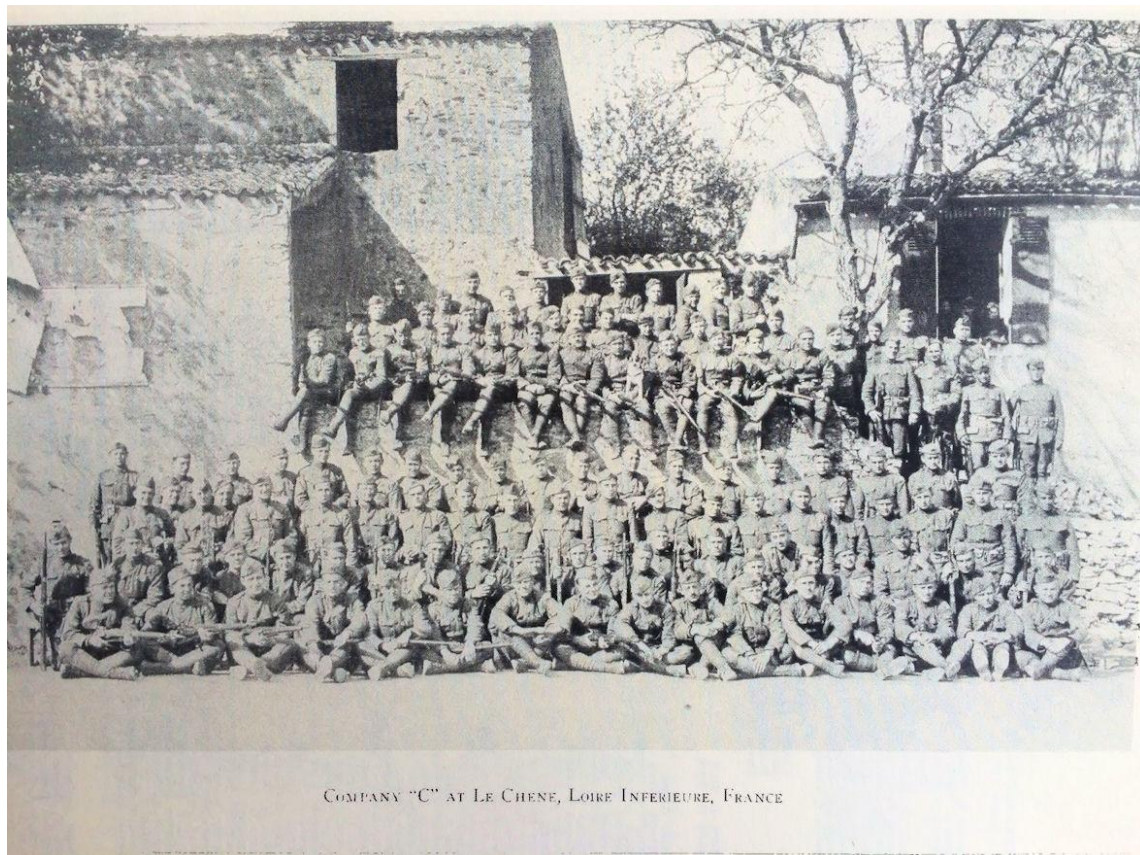
This Regiment consisted mainly of men from Philadelphia and Harry trained at Camp Meade, which had only been established in Maryland after the US joined the war on 7th April 1917. It's still there, but is now known as Fort Meade.



After his initial training, Harry's regiment sailed for France on 9th July 1918 from Hoboken, New Jersey on board the SS America, a former liner of the German-owned Hamburg-America Line which had been commandeered by the US government when the US joined the war. Harry Friel was one of 6,000 soldiers on the ship for the Atlantic crossing and the overcrowding was so great that there was a 3-shift system for sleeping. Although the weather was calm throughout the voyage, it was not without incident – SS America collided with and sank a British freighter one night when both were running without lights. Only 11 of the freighter's crew of 42 were saved.

The voyage took 9 days and the regiment landed at Brest in Brittany on 18th July 1918 where the men spent 3 days getting their land legs back before moving by train towards the front. For the next 3 days they travelled through the cities of Rennes, St. Briec, Laval, Le Mans, Tours, Bourges, Nevers, Dijon and Is-sur-Tille, disembarking at Vaux in a training zone designated to the US forces, where they then spent 6 weeks in intensive training.

“C” Company at Le Chene, France



The training area was some way behind the front line but on 13th September 1918 Harry's regiment moved forward into the battle zone. The 315th were taking over a part of the line from the French called Sector 304. It was about 9 miles northwest of the French fortress city of Verdun, where in 1916 the Germans had tried to bleed the French Army dry; they had almost succeeded, although at equal cost to themselves. This was the US soldiers' first experience of battle and finding the ground on which they were to fight littered with bones and skulls from the 1916 fighting must have been a chilling experience for them.

The regiment was about take part in the Meuse-Argonne offensive, or the Battle of the Argonne Forest as it is perhaps better known, which was the Americans' principal engagement of the war. It was part of the Allied "Hundred Day's Offensive" all along the western front which saw them going over to the attack, after it looked like they might lose the war during the German 1918 spring offensive. Further north it was the British and French who were doing the attacking, around Verdun it was the Americans and the French.



Sector 304, looking across no man's land in the general direction of the 315th line of attack in the Battle of Argonne.

The objective of the Meuse – Argonne offensive was to capture the city of Sedan which was a rail and road junction, vital to the supply of the German Army. 1.2 million American soldiers were involved from the first attack on 26th September, with heavy fighting every day right up until the Armistice on 11th November – 47 days in all. They were attacking the Hindenburg Line which was a typically formidable German defensive position - multiple lines of defence manned by very experienced Germans, across ground churned by years of war and uphill at that. Although the US troops had been thoroughly trained they lacked battle-field experience at all levels but in spite of that they ground on towards their objectives.

The US generals repeated the failed tactics of mass frontal attacks which had been so deadly for millions of soldiers already, and as a result American losses were typical of WW1 offensives. In the 47 days of the Battle the of the Argonne, the US Army lost 26,277 men killed and 95,786 wounded – making 122,063 in total, an average of 2,600 men each day.

COMPANY C



A VIEW OF "DEATH VALLEY" SHOWING MOLLEVILLE FARM AT THE LEFT AND REGIMENTAL P. C. AT THE UPPER RIGHT HAND CORNER OF THE PICTURE. NOTE SHELL POCKED GROUND BETWEEN MOLLEVILLE FARM AND REGIMENTAL P. C.

Molleville Farm where Harry Friel was killed

Harry Friel almost survived to the Armistice, but unfortunately he was either killed or fatally wounded on 5th November 1918 at a place called Molleville Farm, which one American military historian described as "the worst death trap east of the Meuse". It was a key position in the German defences on the Heights of Meuse, in the hills surrounding Sedan, which ironically had fallen to the French a few days earlier, and the Americans threw men into attacking it right until the Armistice. American casualties in this area had been relentlessly heavy for about a month before Harry was killed.

THE 315TH INFANTRY

Killed in Action

Field and Staff Officers

MAJOR WARD W. PIERSON

FIRST LIEUT. BENJAMIN BULLOCK, 3RD

Company A

FIRST LIEUT. ALFRED L. QUINTARD
CORP. VINCENT J. BYRNE
CORP. ESTERINO A. CRUELLE
PVT. 1ST CL. REUBEN H. DUFFEL
PVT. ANTHONY BARBOZCVRICZ
PVT. CARMINE CAPELLUPPO
PVT. ENRICE CICONNI
PVT. NICOLA CRISPI

PVT. BRYANT M. DOLBOW
PVT. PATRICK EGAN
PVT. NICHOLAS FORLINNI
PVT. JAMES GAFFNEY
PVT. HERMAN R. HERTZBERG
PVT. JOHN ISCHI
PVT. EMMETT G. LAUB
PVT. JOSEPH J. LENAHA

PVT. ERNEST LIVINGSTON
PVT. ELMER OGDEN
PVT. ELWOOD G. PAUL
PVT. FRANK C. RICHTER
PVT. SALVATORE SCHIMMENTI
PVT. NATHAN C. SHUTE
PVT. EDWARD F. SMITH

Company B

CORP. HENRY E. P. PRITCHARD
BUGLER HENRY J. JACOBY
PVT. 1ST CL. FREDERICK BUCKWALD
PVT. 1ST CL. JOHN J. NOCITO
PVT. 1ST CL. ALBERT F. PFLIEGER
PVT. JOHN G. BOSS

PVT. SAMUEL DORIS
PVT. JACOB EHRLICH
PVT. HARRY EICHENBERGER
PVT. WILLIAM HAWK
PVT. GROVER C. KOOK
PVT. LOUIS LOHMULLER

PVT. GEORGE MOSS
PVT. RALPH SAUTER
PVT. CARLO SCAGLIO
PVT. RAFFAELE SPIOTTA
PVT. CESLAW STEPULKOWSKI
PVT. JAMES SWORD

Company C

SGT. LOUIS OERLEMANS
SGT. JOHN J. READ
CORP. DAVID P. ANDERSON
CORP. GEORGE DANIG
CORP. HARRY FRIEL
CORP. GEORGE HORN
CORP. EDWIN R. SOUDERS
MECH. EDWARD FLEISCH
PVT. 1ST CL. CHAS. E. WRIGLEY
PVT. VICTOR ANTIMARY

PVT. JOHN K. BISHOP
PVT. THEODORE C. BROWN
PVT. FRED J. FUDALA
PVT. ALEXANDER GILCHRIST
PVT. LEO HART
PVT. EDWARD T. KANE
PVT. ERAKLE KOZMAN
PVT. JAMES S. MAILUS
PVT. GIOVANNI PADUANO

PVT. WILLIAM M. PAYNTER
PVT. LEO RACZKOWSKI
PVT. FRANK SANTISIRI
PVT. NICK SERAGO
PVT. HARRY A. SHIVELY
PVT. PAUL J. SMITH
PVT. LOUIS STEIN
PVT. LEO J. SWARTZ
PVT. STEPHEN TERZITTA

Company D

1ST LT. SETH C. HETHERINGTON
SGT. WILLIAM CUNNINGHAM
SGT. ELMER R. FOX
SGT. CLARENCE PANCOAST
CORP. FRED BAUMEISTER
CORP. ISAAC COHEN
CORP. PETER KERR
CORP. STORMONTH POLLOCK
CORP. EDWARD POYNTZ
CORP. ABRAM STREET
MEC. THOMAS MOORE
MEC. WILLIAM J. MOORE
PVT. 1ST CL. HENRY CANTAVESPIE
PVT. 1ST CL. ORMILL S. CUMMINGS
PVT. 1ST CL. JOHN J. CURRAN

PVT. 1ST CL. CHARLES DIEHL
PVT. 1ST CL. STEPHEN ESTERLY
PVT. 1ST CL. LUIGI GAGLIARDI
PVT. 1ST CL. MICHAEL KENNY
PVT. 1ST CL. JAMES KILLEN
PVT. 1ST CL. JOHN McNAMARA
PVT. 1ST CL. R. A. SULLIVAN
PVT. JAMES BAIN
PVT. FRANCIS F. CARTON
PVT. LEE N. COOK
PVT. DAVID DIAMOND
PVT. GEORGE R. HILL
PVT. JAMES P. KELLY
PVT. MARTIN E. KELLY
PVT. MORRIS KRUFERMAN

PVT. FRANK LEWIS
PVT. ALEXANDER MCCLEAN
PVT. JOHN A. MURRAY
PVT. WALTER MUSSACK
PVT. MORRIS NACHITGAL
PVT. SAMUEL NOVICK
PVT. HULEN W. PHELPS
PVT. JOHN J. QUINN
PVT. CHARLES SCHNELL
PVT. BENJAMIN TRAFFICAN
PVT. FRANK TREDINO
PVT. LEONARD VECCHIONE
PVT. BIRCHARD WHITE
PVT. JOSEPH O. YEHLE

Company E

SGT. APAU KAU
CORP. RAYMOND F. KUHL
CORP. DAVID SAUBERBLATT
CORP. SPENCER H. SAUER
CORP. RICHARD G. WEISE
PVT. 1ST CL. JAMES P. FAHEY
PVT. CLARENCE J. ANDERSON

PVT. THEODORE BURAWSKI
PVT. HARRY F. DIAMOND
PVT. GEORGE J. DIETERLE
PVT. MICHAEL D. GOONAN
PVT. CHARLES J. KELLY
PVT. JAMES J. KINSER
PVT. STEPHEN MASHK

PVT. PIETRO MEROLA
PVT. RICHARD J. RORKE
PVT. ELWOOD E. SCHLARB
PVT. WALTER O. SKINNER
PVT. CLINTON E. SMITH
PVT. WM. T. STEINHAEUER

Page One Twenty-eight

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Printed List of 315th Regiment's Casualties

No doubt the situation was chaotic, with fierce fighting still going on and the Armistice imminent, but subsequent events do not reflect well on the quality of administration or indeed on the level of compassion of the United States Army.

David Friel has a copy of a letter, below, which is undated but was clearly written some considerable time after Harry Friel had been killed, from Harry's parents to the US

authorities, asking about his welfare. They had been advised that he had been wounded on 5 November but nothing further. Letters to him had received no reply. Nor, apparently, did this letter to the authorities.

Harry's mother's letter to US Authorities

866-1
R. Friel 19 Albert Saint Alexandra

10 Q 19.

To: American Headquarters.

Sir,

I take this liberty of writing to you to ask if you could supply or obtain for me any information regarding my son Corporal Harvey Friel of the 315th. Infantry who was reported wounded on November 5th, 1918. Since that date, I have written several letters to him but received no reply, nor hadn't the letters returned. I am most anxious to know this where abouts or the nature of his wounds. If you could by any chance furnish me with information concerning him, I would be sincerely grateful to you.

I am yours respectfully
R. Friel.

This letter is still in the US National Archives in St Louis Missouri

Harry's wife Anna had also been notified that he had been wounded on 5 November and until March 1919, when she received a letter from another soldier, she had hoped that he was still alive and would come home.

The names of casualties had been recorded daily but towards the end of hostilities the system seems to have broken down. In 1921 a Mr J Frank Barber of Philadelphia wrote to the War Dept, asking for the dates of death of 72 men, including Harry Friel, who had lost their lives at the very end of the war. He received a reply to the effect that because of limited resources and pressure of "important work" the Dept could not expend "time and labor" on his request.

It was not until June 1923 that a War Dept internal memo confirmed that Harry had been killed in action on 5 November 1918. Although Harry's body had already been returned to Anna for re-burial in Philadelphia, this was the first time that the family had been officially notified of the date of his death. To add insult to injury, three months after Harry's final interment Anna had still not received the \$100 funeral allowance from the Army to which she was entitled.

On 13 November 1918 (on what would have been his thirtieth birthday) Harry had been buried in an American Battlefield Cemetery near Molleville Farm. This was a temporary arrangement, because the USA, like all of the Allied combatants on the Western Front, embarked on a program of laying out designated war cemeteries into which soldiers' bodies were transferred in the years after the Armistice. And so on 8 April 1919 Harry Friel's remains were removed to another cemetery nearby.

However, unlike all of the other Allied combatant countries, the United States Army sent soldiers' bodies home in every case of their families asking them to. Finally, in August 1921, at Anna's request, Harry's remains were returned to her and he found his final resting place in Oakland Cemetery Philadelphia.

In 1924 Anna remarried. She had several children and died in 1983, at the age of 89 in Pleasantville New Jersey.

(4 of the photographs in this article are taken from the book "The Official History of the 315th Infantry" published 1920, reprinted 2013 by Repressed Publishing of Utah).

The Lennox Herald Article 2009

20 Lennox Herald, Friday, November 20, 2009

Tribute is paid to brave WWI soldier

A SOLDIER commemorated on Alexandria's war memorial was sadly killed in action the day before World War I ended. By Lorraine Waddell

John has enjoyed carrying on his family's military history and served in the British Army between 1949 and 1951.

He said: "The First World War did them quite a lot of good in shaping their own personal characters. I really admired them."

Although John now stays in Paisley, he makes regular visits to Alexandria and is proud of his family's links with the area.

He said: "I go down to Alexandria every year just after Remembrance Day to pay my respects to this family."

"I'm fiercely proud of them."

"They were great men, so proud of the fact that they had been in the British Army and, of course, Harry in the US Army."

Our picture shows the brothers, from left to right, Pat, Jimmy, John and Harry with their parents. It is thought that the picture was taken during the First World War but Harry's image was superimposed onto the photograph as he was in America at the time. Sadly he never returned home.

Harry Friel, who was a corporal in the US Army, did not survive to celebrate the signing of the armistice treaty which brought the Great War to an end on November 11, 1918.

Last Wednesday, his nephew John Friel remembered Uncle Harry, who fought alongside American servicemen, while his three brothers – including John's dad Pat – battled in France for the British army.

As the nation bowed its head at 11am to remember those who had died in combat, John recalled his four relatives, from Alexandria, who personified the bravery of those who went to fight.

Speaking of his Uncle Harry, John, 79, said: "He was the only brother who was killed in the war and he was killed on the last day."

The Friel family moved to Victoria Street in Alexandria from Ireland during the famine and the boys became proud Scots. They were pleased to represent both Scotland and Ireland during the conflict.



BROTHERS IN ARMS: Pat, Jimmy, John and Harry Friel along with their parents.

MP blasts nuclear plans

THE MP for Helensburgh has pledged to continue his fight to stop nuclear waste from submarines being dumped in the area.

Alan Reid had called on Defence Secretary Quentin Davies to publish the Government's secret nuclear dump list.

Mr Davies would only confirm an Argyll site – believed to be Faslane and Coulport bases – is being considered in the plans.

Mr Reid said: "This secrecy will only lead to speculation. Coulport and Faslane are all totally unsuitable for a nuclear waste dump. Being labelled a nuclear dump would be a severe blow to tourism in Argyll and Bute."

"I will keep up the campaign to stop the waste coming to Argyll and Bute."