

The Great War

1914-1918

*Members of the former
St. Martin Parish, Charlestown
who served in World War I*



Compiled and written by Kathy Reiser, 2019

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The Great War - World War I

1914-1918

This was to be “the war to end all wars” so President Woodrow Wilson said in his address to Congress asking for a declaration of war against Germany in 1917. How could a local skirmish between Austria-Hungary and Serbia explode into a world-wide calamity! The assassination of Austro-Hungarian Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife July 28, 1914 by a Serbian nationalist was the main catalyst for starting the war, but there were four secondary causes that led up to the assassination that fueled the fire amongst the European countries:

1. An arms race to have the best and biggest military
2. Alliances formed between countries for the purpose of each country feeling safe from being overrun by another country
3. Building up national wealth and influence by amassing colonies
4. Belief that one's own nation or culture is superior to all others

Thirty-three nations were involved in the war. In 1914 the two main opposition alliances were the Central Powers composed of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy against the Allied Forces composed of Great Britain, France and Russia.

President Woodrow Wilson declared the United States neutral. He worked tirelessly devising a compromise to end the war, but two events took place that reversed Wilson's decision to remain neutral:

1. January, 1917 Great Britain intercepted a secret diplomatic communication issued from the German foreign office to Mexico proposing a military alliance between them. Germany would financially back Mexico's attack on the U.S. to get back the lands of Texas, Arizona and New Mexico. By keeping the U.S. involved at home defending themselves from the Mexican attack, Germany reasoned the U.S. would stop sending arms overseas to France.
2. February, 1917, Germany began submarine warfare by torpedoing passenger and merchant ships bearing the American flag.

President Wilson went before Congress on April 2, 1917 and asked for a declaration of war against Germany. Congress declared war on April 4, 1917.

The two major war arenas were the Eastern Front running north and south in western Russia and the Western Front running north and south in France and Belgium. The soldiers from St. Martin Parish, Charlestown fought on the Western Front in France.

Trench warfare, mustard gas and submarine warfare were the major tactics Germany used to destroy the Allies. Soldiers were hunkered down in trenches reinforced with barbed wire with gas masks in tow.

Fourteen World War 1 soldiers who were members of the former St. Martin Catholic Parish, Charlestown left the security of their families to protect the freedoms of our country's citizens against a hostile foreign attack. Herman Bruckner, Jerome Bruckner, George Buhl, James Cullen, Jerome Gebhard, Joseph Groeschl, August Heimann, Louis Knier, Andrew Schwarz, Alfred Seichter, Frank Steffen, Peter Steiner, John Weigel and Peter Weigel were strong healthy men who were received into various training camps around the country. All but three, Jerome Bruckner, George Buhl and Frank Steffen, sailed overseas to France to engage in war with the enemy on the Western Front.

The first U.S. infantry troops arrived on the European continent in June, 1917 under the supreme leadership of General John J. Pershing of the American Expeditionary Forces. In October, 1917 the first American soldiers entered combat in France. American soldiers fought valiantly side by side with their British and French counterparts. For the most part, U.S. citizens supported the war, but there was some doubt of Wisconsin's willingness to give full support to the U.S. war effort. More than one-quarter of the state's population was of German or Austrian descent leading some to wonder how eager they would be to fight against relatives in their ancestral homelands. Many of Wisconsin's German-born immigrants were seen as the enemy and were closely watched by the citizenry for any sign of sympathy for the enemy, but the U.S. government need not fear. Wisconsin's immigrants were loyal to the cause.

When the war concluded on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month, 1918 with a victory for the Allies, more than 2 million U.S. troops had served at the Western Front in Europe, and more than 50,000 of them died. Wisconsin had 122,000 serve during the war and nearly 4,000 gave their lives.

Throughout the spring and summer of 1919, victory celebrations of all kinds welcomed the returning soldiers home.

President Wilson, however, did live to see the day that the “the war to end all wars” was not the last war after all.

In Flanders Fields

*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.*

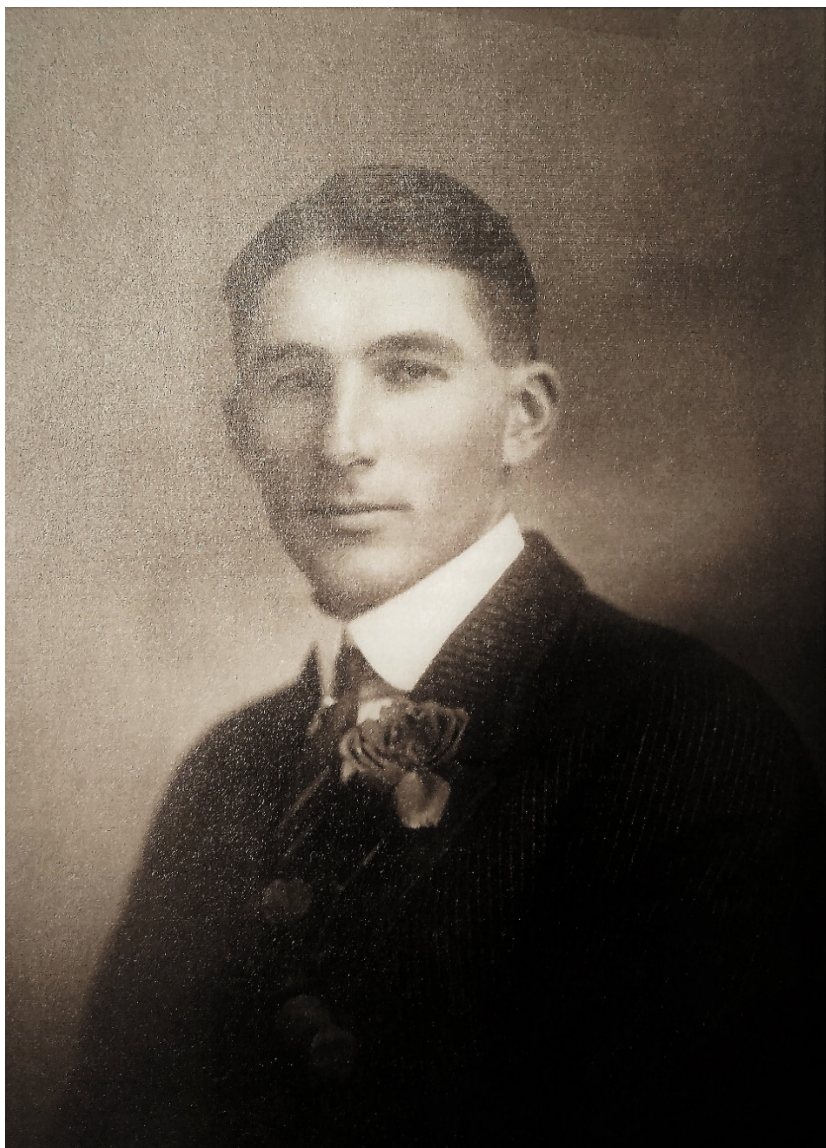
"In Flanders Fields" was written by Canadian Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae after he conducted the burial service for his friend, an artillery officer, Alexis Helmer, who had been killed on the battlefield in the Flanders region of northwest Belgium. In the chaplain's absence, McCrae, as the company doctor, presided over the burial of the young soldier.

McCrae wrote the poem on May 3, 1915 based on what he observed during the burial service - the poppies growing wild around the graves of the fallen soldiers, the sound of the guns firing on the western front, the lives lost.

In January, 1918 while serving as a physician in a British military hospital in France, Lieutenant Colonel McCrae contracted pneumonia, then meningitis and died. He is buried in Wimereux Military Cemetery in northern France.



Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae
Soldier, Physician, Poet
1872-1918



Herman John Bruckner

Born: 10 Apr 1895 Charlestown Township, Calumet Co., WI

Died: 14 Jan 1979 Visalia, Tulare Co., CA

Buried: Unknown

Parents: John & Katherine (Gern) Bruckner

Occupation in 1917: Laborer on Hugo Dhein Farm

Married: Katherine Fischer 27 Oct 1937

Children: Marianne (Bruckner) Osborne, Elizabeth Bruckner

Position: Private, Serial No. 2831583 U.S. Army

Enlisted: 28 May 1918

Military Service: Trained with Co. E 16th Infantry; Herman departed from Hoboken, NJ to St Nazaire, France, fought combat duty with the American Expeditionary Forces in the Argonne Forest region in the Meuse-Argonne Campaign.

Departure: 25 Dec 1918 from Bordeaux, France on ship, U.S.S. Pastores, and docked at Newport News, VA 6 Jan 1919.

Discharged: 1 Feb 1919



Jerome Leogidar Bruckner

Born: 2 Oct 1891 Charlestown Township, Calumet Co., WI

Died: 28 May 1943 Charlestown Township, Calumet Co., WI

Buried: St. Martin Catholic Cemetery, Charlestown, WI

Parents: Conrad & Amelia (Bord) Bruckner

Occupation in 1917: Beet elevator employee at Black Creek, WI

Married: No

Position: Private, Serial No. 3886908 U.S. Army

Enlisted: 22 Jul 1918 Kaukauna, WI

Military Service: Trained in 159 Depot Brigade 52nd Co. 13th Battalion at Fort McClellan, AL. During training exercises, Jerome was overcome by a mustard gas drill which injured his lungs. He remained stateside the remainder of his army service.

Discharged: 20 Mar 1919 at Camp Grant, IL with a medical discharge

Medal: Received WWI Victory Medal w/battle clasp for defensive sector; received WWI Victory Button



George Buhl

Born: 17 Dec 1891 Charlestown Township, Calumet Co., WI

Died: 3 Oct 1918 Camp Grant, Cook Co., IL

Buried: St. Martin Catholic Cemetery, Charlestown, WI

Parents: John & Josephine (Appelbacher) Buhl

Occupation in 1917: Laborer on John C. Pfister Farm

Married: No

Position: Private, Serial No. 4423612 U.S. Army

Enlisted: Unknown

Military Service: Trained in 1st Co. 181st Depot Brigade
During George's training at Camp Grant, IL, he contracted lobar pneumonia and died 3 Oct 1918 at Camp Grant.



James Francis Cullen

Born: 8 Dec 1886 Rantoul Township, Calumet Co., WI

Died: 23 Nov 1977 Charlestown Township, Calumet Co., WI

Buried: St. Augustine Catholic Cemetery, Chilton, WI

Occupation in 1917: Teamster at Lime Quarry in Grimms, WI prior to enlistment and Foreman of Hayton Lime Kiln in Charlestown, WI upon returning from service

Parents: Thomas & Sarah (Harlow) Cullen

Married: Julia Boettcher 27 Sep 1917

Children: Bernice (Cullen) Schmitz, Pearl (Cullen) Bruns, Doris (Cullen) Schmitz, George Cullen, James Cullen

Position: Private, Serial No. 2305293, Army cook

Enlisted: 5 June 1917 in Manitowoc, WI

Military Service: Trained with Co. H, 2nd Wisc. Infantry at Camp Douglas, WI., continued training at Camp MacArthur, Waco, TX and assigned to Co. E, 162nd Infantry U.S. Army. Served with American Expeditionary Forces in France, 12 Mar 1918 - 19 Apr 1919

Discharged: 13 May 1919 at Camp Grant, IL

Medal: Received the American Expeditionary Forces Medal

Jerome John Gebhard



Born: 9 Jan 1894 Charlestown Township, Calumet Co., WI

Died: 12 Feb 1973 Plymouth, WI

Buried: St. Mary Catholic Cemetery, Sheboygan Falls, WI

Parents: John & Margaret (Pfister) Gebhard

Occupation in 1917: Laborer on George Schwarz Farm

Married: Mary Boll 19 June 1919

Children: Norbert Gebhard, Vivian (Gebhard) Keippel,
Ralph Gebhard

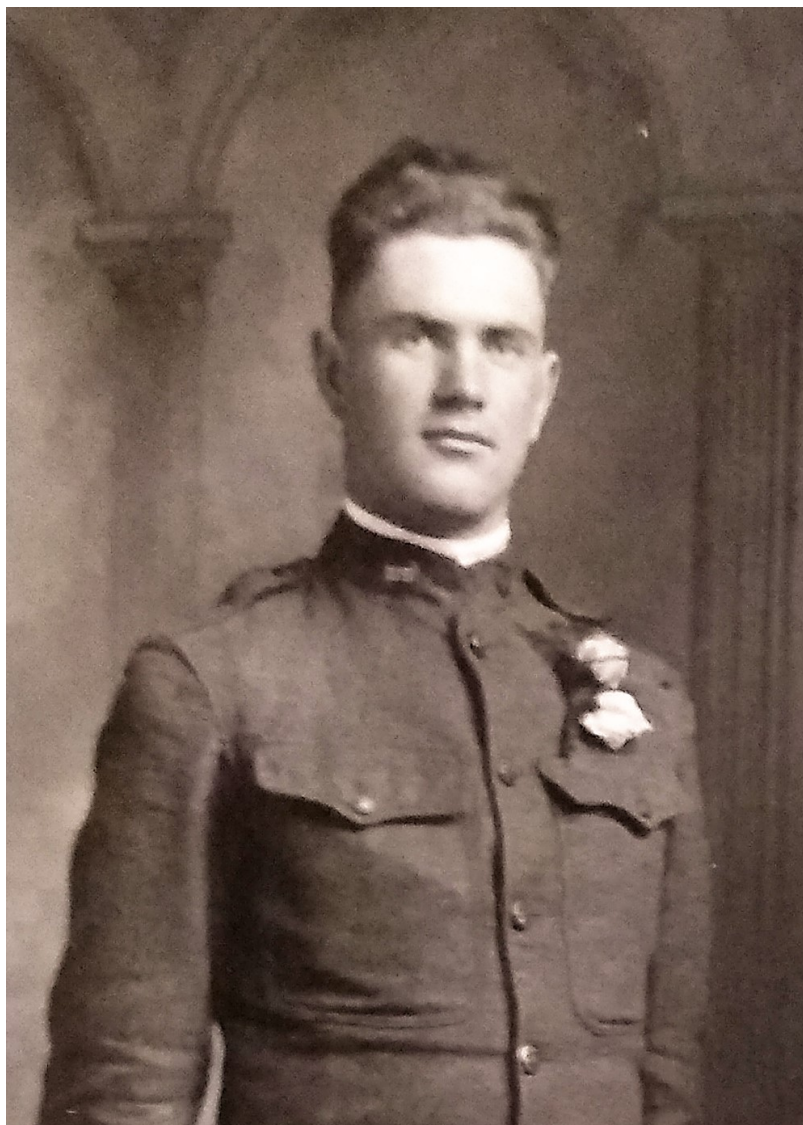
Position: Private, Serial No: 2045364 U.S. Army

Enlisted: 29 April 1918 Chilton, WI

Military Service: Trained in Co F 310 Supply Train 85th Division; Jerome arrived by coach from Milwaukee to Camp Custer, MI 30 Apr 1918 where he received training. Most of this division fought on the Western Front in France with battles at St. Mihiel and Meuse-Argonne. His duty was supply truck driver. He did not participate in any combat operations. After the armistice was signed, Jerome remained in France with the occupation forces. From 9 Jan to 15 Feb 1919, Jerome spent time in French hospitals for chronic bronchitis.

Departure: 22 Feb 1919 departed Brest, France on ship, S.S. Aquitania, and arrived in New York 28 Feb 1919

Discharged: 5 April 1919 at Camp Grant, IL



Joseph Fred Groeschl

Born: 15 Apr 1896 Brothertown Township, Calumet Co., WI

Died: 29 Nov 1944 Fond du Lac, WI

Buried: Calvary Cemetery, Fond du Lac, WI

Parents: Anton & Catherine (Wettstein) Groeschl

Occupation in 1917: Laborer on Fred Koehler Farm

Married: Clara Heimann 4 Feb 1919

Children: Lillian (Groeschl) Leu, Joseph Groeschl, George Groeschl, Robert Groeschl, Clarence Groeschl, Bernetta (Groeschl) Wenig, Bernice (Groeschl) Ziegler

Position: Private, Serial No. 4410358 U.S. Army

Enlisted: 5 Sep 1918 Chilton, WI

Military Service: Departed to France and fought with the American Expeditionary Forces with the 13th Replacement Battalion on the Western Front. He contracted pneumonia and rheumatic fever while in service and also suffered the effects of shell shock.

Discharged: 29 Dec 1918 Camp Grant, IL



August Martin Heimann

Born: 5 Oct 1890 Charlestown Township, Calumet Co., WI

Died: 18 Jan 1959, New Holstein, Calumet Co., WI

Buried: Our Savior Lutheran Cemetery, Valders, WI

Parents: Robert & Regina (Bonlander) Heimann

Occupation in 1917: Operated the Heimann Homestead

Married: Theresa Steffen 20 Oct 1914

Christine Velgun 11 Jan 1921

Children: Gordon Heimann

Position: Private, Serial No. 2814734 U.S. Army

Enlisted: 10 May 1918 New Holstein, WI

Military Service: Trained in Co B Supply 64th Infantry as Wagoner. August departed from NYC, NY 14 Aug 1918 on ship, S.S. America, to France; delivered supplies by horse and wagon to the American Expeditionary Forces on the Western Front

Departure: From France 9 Jun 1919 on ship, France, arriving at Hoboken, NJ 19 June 1919

Discharged: 26 June 1919

Louis Peter Knier



Born: 12 Aug 1895 St. Nazianz, Manitowoc Co. WI
Died: 22 May 1964 Sheboygan, WI
Buried: Calvary Cemetery, Sheboygan, WI
Parents: John & Mary (Weber) Knier
Occupation in 1917: Laborer on John Kolbe Farm
Married: Mary Gebhard 13 Apr 1921
Children: Eugene Knier, Lester Knier

Position: Private, Serial No. 2831732 U.S. Army
Enlisted: 28 May 1918 Chilton
Military Service: Trained in Co. M 338th Infantry, 85th Division; sailed 17 Oct 1918 from NYC, NY on ship, S.S. Minnekahda, to France arriving 27 Oct 1918. Louis then moved to Co. E 28th Infantry where he saw action at the St. Michiel Offensive on the Western Front. He also served in Archangel, northern Russia with an Allied intervention in the civil war there after the 1917 revolution
Departure: Sailed 22 Aug 1919 from Brest, France on ship U.S.S. Suwanee to Hoboken, NJ arriving 3 Sep 1919; then to Camp Merritt, NJ
Medals: Purple Heart for injuries suffered in battle
Discharged: 25 Sep 1919



Andrew S. Schwarz

Born: 1 April 1895 Charlestown, Calumet Co., WI

Died: 8 August 1965 Madison, WI

Buried: St. Mary Catholic Cemetery, Chilton, WI

Occupation in 1917: Laborer on Herman Ullrich Farm

Married: Rose Merget 14 Jul 1919

Children: Jerome Schwarz, Earl Schwarz, Eugene Schwarz,
Florian Schwarz, Rita (Schwarz) Novak, Elizabeth (Schwarz)
Burns

Position: Private, Serial No. 2039853, U.S. Army

Military Service: Trained in Battery A 111th Field Artillery
29th Division at Camp McClellan, AL; departed 29 Jun 1918
to France on ship, S.S. Demonsthenes. While with the
American Expeditionary Forces on the Western Front,
Andrew inhaled mustard gas which caused chronic post-war
health issues.

Departure: sailed from France 13 May 1919 on ship, U.S.S.
Virginian, and arrived 23 May 1919 at Newport News, VA
and Camp Stuart

Alfred Joseph Seichter



Born: 28 Nov 1893 Charlestown Township, Calumet Co., WI

Died: 15 Mar 1974 Stanley, Chippewa Co., WI

Buried: St. Joseph Catholic Cemetery, Boyd, Chippewa Co., WI

Parents: Frank & Anna (Muellenbach) Seichter

Occupation in 1917: Farm Laborer at home

Married: Frances Weigel 25 Nov 1924

Children: Alvin Seichter, Robert Seichter, Florian Seichter, Norbert Seichter, Lorraine (Seichter) Matthews, Herbert Seichter, Martin Seichter, Sylvester Seichter, Mary Ann (Seichter) Pogodzinski, Dorothy (Seichter) Potuczek, Alice (Seichter) Balow, Felix Seichter, Theresa (Seichter) Johnson, Mark Seichter

Position: Corporal, Serial No. 3750023 U.S. Army

Enlistment: 22 July 1918 Stanley, Chippewa Co., WI

Military Service: Trained in Co M 342nd Infantry 86th Division; Alfred departed 9 Sep 1918 NYC, NY on ship, S.S. Minnekahda, to France; trained in Co 7 AEC (Labor Corps as cook); then assigned to the Army Service Corps supplying the troops.

Departure: 26 Jun 1919 from St. Nazaire, France on ship, U.S.S. Kentuckian, arriving in Hoboken, NJ 7 Jul 1919

Discharged: Jul 1919 Camp Merritt, NJ



Frank X. Steffen

Born: 8 Oct 1888 Eaton Township, Manitowoc Co., WI

Died: 14 Nov 1970 Chilton, Calumet Co., WI

Buried: St. Martin Catholic Cemetery, Charlestown Township, WI

Parents: John & Caroline (Fehrenbach) Steffen

Occupation in 1917: Mason for Ehnert Brothers

Married: Veronica Seichter 26 Aug 1919

Children: Leander Steffen, Randolph Steffen, Genevieve (Steffen) Wollersheim Heimann, Wilmer Steffen, Kenneth Steffen, Hermes Steffen, Allen Steffen, Celestine Steffen, Arlyn Steffen

Position: Private, U.S. Army

Military Service: Trained in Co B 31 Machine Gun Battalion; Frank never saw active duty overseas because the Armistice had been signed during his training period.



Peter Steiner

Born: 25 Mar 1890 in Jackson Co., MN

Died: 28 Oct 1968 West Bend, Washington Co., WI

Buried: Holy Angels Catholic Cemetery, West Bend, WI

Parents: Anton & Magdalena (Bonlander) Steiner

Occupation in 1917: Laborer on John Schmitz Farm

Married: No

Position: Private, U.S. Army

Enlisted: 1917 Chilton, WI

Military Service: Trained in Co F 38th Infantry at Camp Shelby, MS; deployed to France in the closing days of the war and saw no combat; served with the occupation forces to stabilize the area



John August Weigel

Born: 27 Jun 1894 McMillan, Marathon Co., WI

Died: 23 Nov 1985 Wisconsin Veterans Home, King,
Waupaca Co., WI

Buried: Gate of Heaven Cemetery, Marshfield, WI

Parents: Joseph & Rosina (Schnell) Weigel

Occupation in 1917: Laborer on Weigel homestead

Married: Rosina Trossen 18 June 1928

Children: Dolores (Weigel) Scheuer

Position: Private, Serial No. 3749780 U.S. Army

Enlistment: Unknown

Military Service: Trained in Co G 341st Infantry 86th Division, John departed to France to fight with the American Expeditionary Forces on the Western Front. He was wounded in the battle of Argonne Forest, and according to family sources, was carried off the battlefield by German prisoners. He recuperated at the hospital at Fort Snelling, MN.



Peter Weigel

Born: 27 Jul 1890 McMillan, Marathon Co., WI

Died: 12 Feb 1951 Rozelville, Marathon Co., WI

Buried: St. Andrew Catholic Cemetery, Rozelville, WI

Parents: Joseph & Rosina (Schnell) Weigel

Occupation in 1917: Self-employed Farmer

Married: Rose Andres 25 Nov 1919

Children: Clarence Weigel, Alois Weigel, Marcella (Weigel) Martin, Mildred (Weigel) Wehe, Evelyn (Weigel) Bild, Lena (Weigel) Sterz , Rosemarie (Weigel) Kaas, Peter Weigel

Position: Private, Serial No. 28300146 U.S. Army

Enlistment: 27 May 1918

Military Service: Trained to be a horse caretaker, Peter departed to France to work in the rear lines of the Western Front delivering supplies by horse and wagon.

Discharged: 22 Jul 1919