

Post 2704 History

I recently received this historical data from Mr. Henry `Hank" Dethlefs III (Nephew of Pvt. Rudolph Deml). The following was copied from the VFW Post 2704 monthly bulletin (Volume V, Number 11, November 1982):

Following the dedication of our Veterans' Memorial on Saturday, October 30th (1982), your editor was advised that several Comrades and Auxiliary Sisters would like to see the article regarding Rudolph Deml's death, which was read by Senior Vice Commander Chuck Gearheart at the dedication, reprinted in our Newsletter so that they might have a copy of it. Accordingly, here is the article which was originally provided to our Post by Comrade and Mrs. Charles Buresh. (Comrade Buresh died August 14th (1982) – Mrs. Blanche Buresh is an Auxiliary Sister.) The article was originally printed in the South Omaha Sun on October 26, 1958, and was reprinted in our Post 2704 Newsletter of August 1975.

SHELL BLAST KILLED RUDOLPH DEML

It was dark, but still the night was beautiful. It was not unlike a crisp fall night in Omaha. But it was different. There was a tension in the air. And in the distance was the rumble of guns that spewed death in the trenches across both sides of "No Man's Land" in France.

Underneath the rumble a group of American soldiers slept fitfully on a French hillside. They were dug in on that rocky hillside to take cover from whatever shells the Germans might throw their way. Suddenly, a little after midnight, a lone German shell came. Its whistling became loader and woke the men who were crouched in their shallow foxholes. They awaited the explosion that came. When it was over, eight of the Americans were victims of the shower of hot shrapnel that raked their positions.

That was the setting of an incident of World War I which is kept alive in South Omaha by the name of one of those eight wounded Americans. He was Rudolph Deml, whose name is today carried by VFW Post #2704. He gave his life for his country October 29, 1918, in the Argonne Forest.

Deml was a member of the F Company of the 33rd Infantry Regiment of the 89th Division. His unit had fought at St. Mihiel and been brought to the Argonne-Meuse front as a reserve unit – what was left of F Company. Only 28 were left. They were waiting for the last big push of the war which was to kick off November 1st, and would force the Germans to ask for peace. Shelling in the area had been constant before that night. But that night the artillery activity was quiet. It was that lone shell, not the usual salvo of four shells, that snuffed out the life of the young South Omahan.

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Deml and seven other members were carried to the corrugated iron first-aid hut where, by the dim light of a candle, medical aides tried to treat their wounds. The darkness of the night prevented them from determining who was the most seriously wounded and they treated the victims as they came. Deml was the fifth to receive attention. He had been hit by the flying metal high on the right thigh, where the artery was severed. By the time that the first aid men got to him, Deml had lost a great deal of blood. The tourniquet that was applied in an effort to stop the flow proved futile. Before the cold dawn reached the French hillside, Rudolph Deml was dead. At 23, a soldier a little over six months, but a veteran of three months of hard fighting in France, Deml died in a crude French hut, perhaps a victim of the lack of battlefield medicine of the time.

In the foxhole with Deml, listening to that lone German shell sing, was another South Omahan. He was J. J. Bartos. He and Deml had decided to share a foxhole "as the digging in that rock soil was so tough". They were close companions, Bartos was an automatic rifleman; Deml was one of his ammunition carriers. Bartos too was hit, and in the thigh also. But he was able to control his wounds bleeding. Until his death recently, he carried a piece of German shell that lodged in his thigh.

The two South Omahans were close friends as well as soldiers, although were not acquainted in South Omaha. Their friendship started in France. That friendship had carried them into the nearby town of Romage the afternoon of the fateful night. They went into town to get "sack paste" which they would rub on their bodies as protection against German gas. Bartos had thought the young Deml may have had a premonition about the impending events. On the walk into town, Deml disclosed that he should have made some changes to his personal affairs "back home". "Jerry, I'm afraid that I am not going back." Bartos remembered Deml as a "typical nice guy". The husky six-footer, according to him, was "a promoter in some ways". On the way back from town that day, he talked some other outfit into feeding us. Our kitchen was slow. Although the war's end was but two short weeks away, the two young South Omahans had no inkling of it as they trudged back to their outfit. No "peace" rumors had been heard by the company.

After the shell burst, both were taken to the first aid station for treatment. For the long hours, which were made longer by the dark and fear, their stretchers were side-by-side. Bartos remembered the young Deml kept asking for water as the Medics worked over him. He maintained that Deml was given the best medical care possible under the conditions, that if the incident had happened in the daytime, his friend would perhaps be alive today.

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This opinion is not new. The medical man that treated Deml wrote the same thing to Deml's sister Goldie, now Mrs. H. I. Dethlefs, 4420 Woolworth Ave., in 1921. C. R. Wareham of Kearney was the member of the 355th Medical Detachment who treated Deml at the aid station. He wrote that if Deml had been one of the first treated, or if the incident had been during daylight hours, the outcome might have been different. He said that Deml's condition was serious from loss of blood when first treated. Wareham sent a runner for an ambulance, which did not come until just before dawn. By that time Deml had bled to death.

Rudolph Deml was born December 28, 1894, and went to Jungman School. He was employed in the South Omaha packing industry until he entered the Army in April 1918. He arrived in France in July.

His body was returned to the United States and reburied in Graceland Park Cemetery, September 10, 1921.

Richard Imgrund
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