World War I Monument at Cheppy, France, honoring military casualties from the 35th Division, which included Missouri and Kansas National Guard members called to active duty in France.

Photo by Dr. Robert Wiegers

Cheppy and the 35th Division: What Missouri Forgot

For Lack of an Armory

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Editor's Page

The Lessons of History are Fading into the Past . . .

“Many signs point to a growing historical consciousness among the American people. I trust that this is so. It is useful to remember that history is to the nation as memory is to the individual. As persons deprived of memory become disoriented and lost, not knowing where they have been and where they are going, so a nation denied a conception of the past will be disabled in dealing with its present and its future.”

—Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr.

The eminent historian’s quotation is from an essay he wrote for the New York Times under the heading “Folly’s Antidote.” It appeared two months before he died, in the winter of 2007, at the age of 89. It proved to be his final word on the reading and writing of history. “As was his custom,” writer Lewis Lapham notes in his latest book, Age of Folly: America Abandons Its Democracy, “the author [Schlesinger] began with the bringing of the past to bear on the present.”

Schlesinger was an American historian, social critic, and public intellectual. He was also the son of an influential historian, Arthur M. Schlesinger Sr., who was a specialist in American history. Much of the younger Schlesinger’s work explored the history of 20th-century American liberalism. In particular, his work focused on leaders such as Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, John F. Kennedy, and Robert F. Kennedy.

He was preeminently qualified to pass judgments on the discipline of history and its place in the social fabric of America. His hope that there is “a growing historical consciousness among the American people” was an optimism that he often couched in cautious terms in other of his writings. But he never wavered in his insistence that an understanding of the past was critical to making sound public policy judgments in the present and for the future.

The war-time focus of this issue of the Quarterly was prompted by personal sentiments along these lines. When approached by Central Methodist University History Professor Robert Wiegers one day earlier this year and asked if I would be interested in publishing papers written by two students in his American History classes, I responded affirmatively. As a former student of history in college, I am always open to doing what I can to encourage young people with an interest in history. The articles on a Missouri World War I monument in Cheppy, France (page 4), and the proposed building of an armory in Fayette (page 10) were written by CMU students Miranda Dahman and Emile Faust, respectively. More information about the authors is included with the articles.

Unfortunately, the findings of recent surveys of the American public and of high school and college students regarding their knowledge of American history are not encouraging.

A 2015 survey on “Americans’ Knowledge of Government,” published in the January 19, 2016, issue of VOA News (Voice of America), concluded that many people who live in the United States are “alarmingly ignorant of America’s history and heritage.” The poll surveyed both college graduates and the general public and found many were lacking some basic knowledge about the U.S.

Among the findings: Only 20.6 percent of Americans were able to identify James Madison as the father of the Constitution; most thought it was Thomas Jefferson, who was the primary author of the Declaration of Independence.

Roughly 60 percent of college graduates polled couldn’t correctly name a requirement for the ratification of a constitutional amendment, and 40 percent didn’t know Congress has the constitutional authority to declare war.

“These were not isolated findings,” said the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA), which conducted the survey.

A 2012 ACTA survey found that less than 20 percent of American college graduates could accurately identify the effect of the Emancipation Proclamation, less than half could identify George Washington as the American general at Yorktown (Virginia), and only 42 percent knew that the Battle of the Bulge occurred during World War II.

ACTA found in another recent survey that of over 1,100 liberal arts colleges and universities, only 18 percent require a course in American history or government.

“When surveys repeatedly show that college graduates do not understand the fundamental processes of our government and the historical forces that shaped it, the problem is much greater than a simple lack of factual knowledge,” said ACTA. “It is a dangerous sign of civic disempowerment.”

ACTA describes itself as an “independent, non-profit organization committed to academic freedom, excellence, and accountability at America’s colleges and universities.”

—Don B. Cullimore
The Cheppy, France, Monument to Missouri’s Fallen Soldiers

By Miranda Dahman

A story of the building and dedication, subsequent neglect and then restoration of a WW I monument at Cheppy, France, that honors Missouri soldiers lost in battle in France.

For Lack of a National Guard Armory in Fayette

Hopes soar in the 1930s for construction of a National Guard armory at Fayette, and then give way to financing problems and the start of WW II. A building on the corner of Morrison and South Main Streets that began as the Fayette opera house continues serving as quarters for an armory.

WW II Plane Crash Near Fayette Claims 4 Lives

The realities of war are brought close to home when a military transport aircraft crashes near Fayette in June 1944, killing its four U.S. Air Force crew members who were on a training flight from a nearby air base.

Book Notes: A new biography of Gen. John J. Pershing and Americans who served in France during WW I is based on letters they wrote home. And a comprehensive description of Missouri military armories is written by a CMU professor of history.
Cheppy and the 35th Division: What Missouri Forgot

By Miranca S. Dahman

During the First World War, the 35th Division, made up of Missouri and Kansas National Guard units, freed the city of Cheppy, France, while receiving heavy casualties. The citizens of Missouri, wanting to recognize the efforts of the Division, established the Missouri Monuments Commission with the intent of creating a suitable memorial. Nancy Hahn won the design competition opened by the Commission with her model titled “Victory.” Her creation was built on the site of the battle near Cheppy and was a great source of pride for both the people of Cheppy and Missourians. Good intentions, however, did not substitute for thorough planning for the future of the monument, and the battle for money and maintenance began shortly after the dedication.

35th Division

The Missouri and Kansas National Guard known as the 35th Division participated in the Meuse-Argonne campaign from September 26, 1918, to November 11, 1918. On the first day of the battle the Division broke through enemy lines between Cheppy and Varines where they faced Prussian soldiers and heavy machine gun fire. At this point in the war, sixty-two Congressional Medals of Honor had been awarded with two of them going to men from the 35th Division, both of whom died on the first day of the offensive. Private Nels Wold singlehandedly cleared out four machine gun nests and captured 60 prisoners. Wold and the men in his platoon recorded seven German men dead for every American soldier in their group. His death at the fifth nest they encountered earned him a Congressional Medal of Honor for his bravery in action.

Also awarded the Honor was Capt. Alex Skinker, when he and two men ran out into open ground to draw machine gun fire away from his company, saving many lives. He and his two men were killed and Skinker was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his bravery. Other members of the 35th Division were recognized for their efforts such as Lt. Edward Price who earned the Distinguished Service Cross for leading the final attack on the Prussian troops and taking the town of Cheppy, along with capturing more than 300 Prussian Guardsmen taken prisoner.

Legislative Action

Prior to the disbanding of the armies, both the Missouri Senate and House of Representatives voted unanimously with Governor of Missouri Frederick D. Gardner that the members of the 35th Division be allowed to return home under their own officers and with their own units at the end of the war.

[Resolution language]

Whereas, it has been announced that the 35th Division, composed of the National Guard of Missouri and Kansas, will shortly be returned to this country for muster out of federal service, and whereas, this Division was organized and trained by National Guard officers of Missouri and Kansas and the record made by the citizens of Missouri and Kansas constituting its membership in the battle of the Argonne Forest was one of unsurpassed heroism and efficiency, and whereas, the affection existing between the officers and men composing the Division and their state pride and spirit de corps contributed in the largest measure to their gallant achievements against the professional soldiers of Germany, and ifo acquaint him with the earnest desire of the people of this state that this simple act of justice be done the survivors of more than fourteen thousand Missourians whose efforts and sacrifice have made possible the glorious achievements of this Division.

But to commemorate the 35th Division’s attack, the 50th General Assembly of Missouri signed an Act on May 1, 1919, that allowed the 51st General Assembly of Missouri to allot $25,000 toward the erection of a Monument in France. This Monument was to commemorate the Missourians who fought and died on the battlefields of France during the First World War, and was to be located where the greatest number of Missourians were
engaged [on a battlefield].


World War I Casualties Including 35th Division

In April 1917, the United States entered World War I. Nearly 750,000 Missouri men registered for the draft. Over 156,000 served in all branches of the armed forces and more than 10,000 were wounded or killed in action. Missouri contributed military personnel to all branches of service during the war. Total American casualties in World War I included 116,516 deaths and approximately 320,000 sick and wounded of the 4.7 million men who served. The USA lost more personnel to disease (63,114) than to combat (53,402), largely due to the influenza epidemic of 1918.

Competition

To create the Monument, the Missouri Monuments Commission held an anonymous competition open to all sculptors in Missouri. The jurors in the competition included members of the Monument Commission, sculptor Lorado Taft, architect Irving K. Pond, and painter Ralph Clarkson. All were experts in their fields.

The competition did not have a theme, but the Commission suggested that the monument be a worthy tribute to the Missourians who fought and fell in the War in France. It was also suggested to the sculptors to convey an artistic expression of the State of Missouri’s gratitude. Scale models entered in the competition were required to be two inches to the foot, made of plaster and colored to designate the materials used. The full-sized monument was to be made of bronze and stone, and its scale and size was to be made suitable to the site where it would be built. Upon completion of the monument, it was to be transported to France at the expense of the sculptor. The ad posted in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch on October 7, 1921, stated that the model designs would be expected at the gallery of the St. Louis Arts League no later than 5 p.m. on November 3, 1921. The first-place design would be awarded a bond of $10,000 for the performance of his or her contract whereas a new contract would be constructed for the making and erection of the monument for which the sculptor would receive $3,000. Upon the erection of the monument in France the sculptor would receive an additional $7,000 from the Memorial Commission. Six designs were entered in the contest with the name of each sculptor sealed in an envelope along with the materials that would be used to build the actual monument. The model entries were to be destroyed by the Commission unless they were recovered by the artists at their own expense.

Mrs. Nancy Coonsman Hahn of the St. Louis School of Fine Arts at Washington University and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts won the competition with a sculpture titled “Victory,” which was unanimously chosen over the five other entries by the Monument Commission and the art jury. According to Laredo Taft the decision was based on: “The main impression of the design is that of adequacy. It is simple and straight to the point. The monument will be commanding enough to dominate the landscape. The culmination of victory is competently expressed and the design is good from all sides.” Mrs. Hahn was paid $20,000 of the $25,000 allotted for the Monument for her design and sculpting of the piece. Second place and a prize of $300 was awarded to Frederick C. Hibbard, “It was a seated male figure of bronze with an architectural background of red marble. The jury said the design was good but did not answer the requirements for a tall and commanding figure.” At one point after the competition, Hahn’s plaster model was broken while being shipped to Jefferson City. It was suggest that an insurance claim be filed against Express Company to pay for the repair of the plaster model or the creation of a new one.

Around the same time as the monument competition, a small party was sent to France in 1921 which included Maj. Charles W. Bartlett of Kansas City and Lt. Melvin E. Binswanger of St. Joseph to choose a suitable site for the Monument. The first choice of these commissioners was the Cemetery of Romagne, but the Quartermaster of the Army refused permission for any State or organization to erect monuments in Romagne Cemetery out of respect for the dead. After consultation with the Battle-Monuments Board of the War Department, the Monument Commission chose one of the recommendations of the Battle-Monuments Board called the Three Trees, a site near Cheppy, Meuse, France.

The Community of Cheppy set aside the land on which the Monument stands for perpetual use by the State of Missouri. The site is located at a fork in the road leading to Cheppy and

Capt. Alexander Skinker (left) and Pvt. Nels Wold were both killed on the first day of the Meuse-Argonne offensive Sept. 26, 1918, and were posthumously awarded Congressional Medals of Honor.

Images courtesy of author
Wartime Boonslick

Clearmont. Before the war, this site was home to three trees and a small iron cross set on a stone pedestal and was referred to as “the Three Trees” by locals. For three years during the war, the Germans held this spot, which lay five miles behind the front in France. Directly in front of it was the strong point called Varennes Hill. The Monument Commission was not entirely satisfied with the Three Trees site near Cheppy because it had no significance for the 89th Division. The 89th Division was a national army unit made up of drafted men, mostly Missourians.

No site in France could be found that had something in common with both Missouri divisions and the paths of both divisions did not cross. Clair Kenamore of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch stated, “And while the achievements of the 89th were fully as glorious as the 35th’s, there was no suitable spot in either the St. Mihiel salient or the Argonne over which the 89th had fought which seemed more suitable for a monument to Missouri troops.” The Three Trees site was chosen because it was where Pvt. Nels Wold and Capt. Alexander Skinker each earned the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Building

Nancy Hahn and her husband Emanuel Hahn traveled to France with the completed statue and stayed there to oversee the building of the monument and base setting of the statue. Due to the winter conditions when the monument was being built there were few workers that could be found to help with the construction. Even though there were several hundred Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese workmen in Cheppy, it was hard to find someone to work on the monument. The local laborers were busy with preparing for the coming winter, building houses and gathering crops.

The location of the Three Trees site is under a mile from Cheppy, which posed a problem because there was only one six-ton truck available from the United States Army to transport stones for the monument. Everything else was transported through the rolling hills by mule and cart or by horse. “Add to all this the difficulties of terrain. Our derricks had to stand on filled ground, which meant extensive preparation. Then there was the unexpected rupture of a four-ton chain hoist under a two and a half ton load, a temperature of freezing every morning, and the difficulties of directing a crew consisting of two Italians, six Frenchmen, of whom two were Franco-Italian being from Monaco, a Russian and a Spaniard. Luckily, all of them understand American profanity.” The men who worked on the memorial were considered by the city of Cheppy and by Mr. Hahn, the engineer in charge of the project, as the best men around. They also considered it an honor to work on the Monument. The crew worked sunrise to sunset and although they were strongly unionized craftsmen, they did whatever work was needed of them. During the building and for the unveiling celebration, the area around the monument was considered “zone rouge,” meaning that the area had not yet been combed for explosives and was dangerous for anyone to walk through. The crew had personally dealt with this problem several times: when building a fire to keep warm on site, they were forced to scatter by the explosion of a buried cartridge, and when leveling the ground for the derrick found an American grenade, which was unearthed and later detonated by experts.

Dedication

The monument was originally to be dedicated and unveiled on November 11, 1922, but due to the inauguration of the Great Carrefour of the Armistice, a large, official memorial site where the Armistice was signed, and the creation of Armistice Day as a national holiday in France, an official request of a French Committee changed the dedication date to November 5. The Missouri dedication ceremony boasted a large attendance. Present were: Marshal Joseph Joffre, the chief representative of the French Minister of War; former Premier and President Raymond Poincaré; Maj. Manton Davis, representing the U.S. War Department; Col. T. Bently Mott, military attaché; Commander of the Department of Europe Col. Ward; American Ambassador Myron T. Her-
sent two delegations. Mrs. Atwood Lincoln, widow of a Missouri captain, was given the honors of unveiling the monument. The mayor and city of Cheppy erected a triumphal arch for the parade to pass through.

Out of the total $25,000 that was to be used for the Monument, $4,500 was used for traveling expenses of the three Commissioners, meetings of the Memorial Commission, the design competition, and other details. Maj. Joseph J. Koch of the 26th Infantry, who was present at the Meuse-Argonne campaign and served with the 35th Division, wrote U.S. Sen. Seldon P. Spencer (R-Mo.) requesting to be the official Missouri representative of the Regular Army at the unveiling ceremony. Arthur M. Hyde, governor of Missouri, wrote a similar letter to Secretary of War, the Hon. John W. Weeks, asking for arrangements to make Joseph Koch the Missouri representative of the Regular Army in the unveiling ceremony, stating that he would be a "fitting representative" for both the War Department and Missouri. Joseph J. Koch, Major, 26th Infantry, was in one of the assault battalions on the 26th of September that initiated the Meuse-Argonne Offensive and was wounded in the area of Cheppy; he remained active in the Missouri Guard until retirement. In a reply to Hyde, Weeks wrote that there were no funds available for the expenses of the journey and return that could be made available, but stated that a cablegram was sent to the commanding general of the American Forces in Germany requesting a Missourian officer of his command be present at the unveiling. Infantry Capt. Hugh M. Pinkerton, from the state of Missouri, was designated as the representative of the Army. Monuments Commissioner Norman Comfort suggested that former adjutant, Maj. William H. Cocke, and his wife, Anne, who were to be present at the unveiling ceremony, be given an official status as justice for their services rendered. Arthur Hyde wrote to Major Cocke personally asking him to be his representative at the unveiling ceremony.

**Description of Monument**

Comfort described the monument as such in one of his letters: “The grounds are at a junction of two improved highways, on a gentle (sic) slope, with grass and trees, with the splendid design of the monument to represent in bronze the figure of Liberty extending in her hand a laurel crown to the victors. The statue faces to the north, the direction of the successful, advance of Missouri’s troops in the Battle of the Argonne. The names of the sculptor, engineer and contractor are engraved in the granite; Nancy Coonsman Hahn, Sculptor, Emanuel Hahn, Engineer, and E. Pachy, Entrepreneur, Vire. The main inscription reads: ‘Erected by the State of Missouri, U.S.A., in memory of her sons who died in France for Humanity during the Great War 1917-1918.’ The letters are flush with the surface and the background is sunk and gilted. The site of The Three Trees was donated to the State of Missouri by the community of Cheppy for the building of the monument. The site stands high above the road. Major Comfort suggested that the bank leading down from the monument to the road should be marked off and terraced to make the area surrounding the Monument more serene.”

**Money and upkeep 1922-1938**

On November 21, 1922, in a letter from Norman Comfort to Gen. William A. Raupp, Comfort urged Raupp to use the remaining money allotted for the Monument ($1,754.76 out of $25,000) to beautify the grounds surrounding it. He also suggested placing the remaining money in an account accruing interest to allow a small amount each year to give the Monument care by some appointee of the city of Cheppy, but this logical suggestion was never carried out. At the meeting of the Missouri
Monument Commission in December 1922, the Commission allotted $500 for landscaping, erection of stone steps, etc., on the grounds of the Monument. The mayor of Cheppy was contacted about setting forth improvements and creating a definitive contract that would specify materials and what work will be done for the allotted amount. In another letter from Comfort to Raupp, Comfort lists French Army Capt. Gustave Ehrhardt as the man who handled all of the detail work in France and was involved in the expenses of building the Monument. Comfort asks that Captain Ehrhardt be paid $100 for his work “as he is a man of little means and did not keep an accurate account of his expenditures as most of his expenses were taking French Officials out to lunch in order to overcome the French red-tape that he encountered.” Ehrhardt planned the unveiling ceremony with the help of the French War Department.

By July 5, 1925, only three years after the Monument had been erected and dedicated, the Chicago Sunday Tribune wrote an article about the monument’s derelict condition. The Tribune condemned the disrepair of the monument, stating that it had a barbed wire fence around the area, the hill and grounds surrounding it were covered in unsightly weeds, and the wooden steps up to the monument were covered with weeds and were broken. Upset over the news report, the Rev. Samuel D. Bartle, who had visited the monument reported to Adj. Gen. Frank M. Rumbolt that the monument was not in such bad disrepair as stated. Bartle, a pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church of St. Joseph, happened to travel abroad during the summer of 1925 as a representative for the Donald Duncan Post of the American Legion to check the status of American monuments. He reported that there was no barbed wire surrounding the monument and the weeds around the monument had been cut by the time he had visited and he did not understand why the monument would look so bad, as the mayor of Cheppy was present at the July 4th celebration held a day before the article was published. Unfortunately, Bartle noted that the wooden steps in front of the monument were decayed, broken, and unsafe for general use. Bartle suggested that the front bank be evened out and a stone retaining wall with stone steps be put in to make the site more attractive. Although he listed several modifications to make, Bartle called the Monument the most beautiful at present time on the battlefields of France. Bartle also pointed out that the barbed wire fence present in the Chicago Tribune photograph was located in the lot behind the monument, not in front as the article led readers to perceive.

After Bartle presented his observations that the monument needed constant care to keep it in good condition to the Optimist Club of St. Joseph, the club wrote Gen. Frank Rumbold that they had passed a resolution requesting the state legislature to provide funds for the proper care of the monument and grounds. The American Legion Committee also requested, and was given, the care of the American monuments and grounds in Waregem, Belgium. Because of this, Rumbold requested that they keep the Cheppy Monument in proper shape, or the monument should be passed on to the next general assembly. Unfortunately, the American Battle Monuments Commission informed Major Comfort that they had no authority by law to maintain any memorials, but were seeking legislation which would provide continuing care of American memorials currently erected on the battlefields of Europe. The Missouri monument was approved by the American Battle Monuments Commission, but the Commission pointed out that the monument was never finished and needed a paved area to keep out the weeds and an ornamental fence to keep out the animals. The ABMC desired legislation was never passed, and the American Battle Monuments Commission does not assume responsibility for the Missouri Monument to this day.

Money and Repairs 1938-1960

In June 1938, the Missouri Monument Commission visited Cheppy and the Missouri Monument to inspect it and make arrangements for any needed repairs. Their second mission was to visit the burial places of Missouri troops who lost their lives during the war, which was the first time the state had taken any notice of overseas burial grounds. Since the construction funds were exhausted while building the Monument, flooring, retaining walls, grading, and parking were not constructed until 1927; the Missouri Legislature appropriated $10,000 on April 22, 1927, for completion of this work by the LAHALLE & LEVARD architectural firm of Paris.

The following needed repairs were reported and arrangements were made with Capt. William W. Bessell Jr. of the American Battle Monuments Commission to bid out the work to appropriate contractors: replace coping stones, remove moss from stone surfaces and clean, scrub granite and remove pin points of iron, wax bronze work, lift and relay entrance paving on concrete, clean out drainage scheme, remove two dumps of broken stone from the site, re-turf portions of grass bank where concrete foundations show, re-joint stonework where necessary, re-gild inscriptions, and attend to sickly trees. All work needed approval by the Governor and was overseen by Captain Bessell. He also agreed to disburse a small sum annually to the caretaker of the grounds and personally inspect the Monument and its care. Periodically the State of Missouri had also sent the mayor of Cheppy small sums of money to pay for mowing weeds around the monument, but nothing had been done since then about the natural deterioration of the Monument. The French people of Cheppy are proud of the Monument and in 1938 held their Armistice Day celebration on its grounds. They placed flowers at its base on Decoration Day and placed three bronze leaves at the base, two of which were inscribed: “From the Community of Cheppy” and “From the Souvenir Francais,” which was a French organization that cared for veteran cemeteries and monuments.

By late 1945, Brig. Gen. T. Bentley Mott of the American Battle Monuments Commission of Paris, France, noted that the monument was in good condition except for some needed repair work. He proposed that $100 per year was needed for upkeep and maintenance of the monument and $100 was needed for current repairs. Adjutant General John A. Harris suggested in his letter to Maj. General Edward Stayton that funds be allotted to the American Battle Monuments Commission for the next ten years—$1,100 that he would personally oversee the distribution of. In January 1946, in a letter from Lt. Col. Fred S. Bryant, Bryant asks the Missouri House of Representatives for the $100 repair money as it had not been allotted yet. He stated that repairs were in urgent need
and if the money was not issued soon, the monument would be in a deplorable state of disrepair during the tourist season when many people would likely visit; he also noted that the Monument was located at the junction of two highways where more people driving by would be able to see it and it would reflect on the State of Missouri. He also pointed out that the Monument was located a short distance from the Pennsylvania Monument which had cost the State of Pennsylvania a formidable $300,000 and had a permanent caretaker while the Missouri Monument only cost the State $35,000 and was struggling to allocate funds for maintenance.

In a letter from Thomas North, secretary of the Missouri Battle Monuments Commission, to A. D. Sheppard, adjutant general of Missouri in 1955, North informed Sheppard that the Monument was in extreme disrepair and that complaints had been made, but he stated that the AMBC would not be able to contribute except to oversee repairs if the funds could be made available to them.

He added, “You also inquired whether, if sufficient funds are furnished, this Commission could arrange for proper restoration of the monument and its site, and arrange for maintenance throughout future years. The output of our limited office force controls the pace of the accomplishment of this Commission’s own program. Nevertheless, because the dilapidated condition of the Missouri monument is apt to be blamed upon the United States in general, this Commission would be willing to undertake the task of supervision of repairs if the funds are made available in advance by the state of Missouri.”

North also contradicted General Mott’s statement from 1945 that the Commission had been maintaining grounds surrounding the monument and that the AMBC had no record of maintenance. By 1959 the Legislature had still not appropriated funds for the repair of the Monument, but complaints were still being made to the Adj. Gen. A. D. Sheppard.

Conclusion
The Monument dedicated to the Missouri troops of the 35th and 89th Divisions was a great source of pride for Missourians, the 35th Division, and citizens of Cheppy when it was first built. Due to miscommunications and the lack of appropriate funds, the Monument fell into disrepair and was left almost completely forgotten except by those Missourians that would never forget. Thankfully through the effort of these Missourians, the Monument has been repaired in the following decades and is a proud reminder of the bravery of the 35th Division. Monuments are a noble feature, but without proper foresight and planning, especially for upkeep, can easily become an ongoing, costly issue.

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4 St. Louis Woman Sculptor, 12.
5 Clair Kenamore, "Monument to Missourians to be Dedicated Today." (St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 5 Nov. 1922, p 1-2.)
6 Emanuel Hahn, "Formal Dedication Yesterday of Missouri’s Victory Memorial to Its Soldier Dead at Cheppy." (The St. Louis Star and Times, 6 Nov. 1922, p 3.)
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For the Lack of an Armory

The Saga of a Proposed Fayette National Guard Facility that Never Came to be

By Emilie Faust

It’s the summer of 1935. In spite of the ongoing Great Depression, community leaders in Fayette are eying construction of a new National Guard armory. Various groups are hoping for a modern facility, including officials at Central College (now Central Methodist University), who envision a building for use as a field house, in addition to serving as a community center for town residents. Moreover, the local unit of the Missouri National Guard, Company M, 35th Division, has a particular vested interest, since current facilities have been deemed inadequate by National Guard officials.

In short, a new armory would benefit the community, the college, and Company M.

With the guidance of Lewis M. Means, Fayette Company M had been organized on October 11, 1922. It was generally made up of World War I veterans and college students and was headquartered in the “New” Opera House on the southeast corner of Main and Morrison (now owned by Rick Alexander). With America’s entry into World War II becoming increasingly likely, the company was mobilized on December 23, 1940, and sent to Camp Joseph T. Johnson in Arkansas. Later it became part of the Alaska Defense Command in Sitka. Company M was deactivated in 1946.

A Fayette businessman and World War I veteran, Lewis Means was active in Democratic Party politics and in 1931 was among the first group of captains in the newly formed Missouri State Highway Patrol. He had attended Central College before the war. Later he was Missouri’s adjutant general and after Pearl Harbor served as a full colonel in the active reserves, where he ultimately was placed in charge of U.S. West Coast military security during the later years of World War II. He was given the rank of brigadier general upon his retirement from the army.

A key person involved in the push for a new armory was a Central College education professor, Dr. Bertram I. Lawrence, better known as “B.I.”, who served as a captain in Company M and later as a colonel in the 138th Infantry during World War II.

A key person involved in the push for a new armory was a Central College education professor, Dr. Bertram I. Lawrence, better known as “B.I.”, who served as a captain in Company M and later as a colonel in the 138th Infantry during World War II.

Native Missourian, he was born September 17, 1887, and graduated from Central College in 1914. After World War I service, he was a public school teacher and administrator and later joined the Central faculty, ultimately recognized as a well-known Fayette community leader.

City Council Votes Land Purchase

Meeting on August 30, 1935, Fayette’s City Council votes to purchase land for an armory at the lowest price possible. Proposed tracts are owned by residents [identified as] “Thompson, Ketchum, and Lawrence” (29 acres total). It is suggested a decision be made at the council’s regular meeting on September 3, 1935. At that meeting, it is agreed that any tract designated for an armory is not to exceed five acres, and that any facility designed for use by Company M would be built by the federal government. Council members who voting “Yes” [identified as] “Philips, Liggett, Schnell, Hackley, Brown, and Howard.”

By September 10, 1935, the city had applied for a Work Progress Administration (WPA) funded armory, with the WPA to provide the labor and the city providing land. The proposed structure was to cost $25,000 ($448,000 in today’s dollars) and designated for use by Company M. Local citizens will, in turn, benefit with an armory for dual-use as a community building.

On November 15, 1935, with community support, B. I. Lawrence, commander of Company M, drafts a “status of the armory” report. Estimated costs are calculated and a proposal submitted to the Moberly WPA office. Lawrence’s argument encouraging construction asserts that, if not approved, “Morale of [the] unit will suffer in that men will realize that funds for equipment of non-military CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) units have surpassed that given to either the N.G. or regular army units.”

On December 16, 1935, Fayette Mayor D. C. Rogers, writes Missouri Adj. Gen. H.W. Brown stating that on Aug. 31, 1935, the city had submitted WPA Project #55-2-45-419 to the aforementioned office in Moberly. The proposal requests federal funds totaling $30,982, and notes $3,452 worth of local funds for a total of $34,525 (approximately $8614,200 in today’s dollars). Information on submitted proposal sites, including foundation support and other data, is made available, along with a note that the armory and land must be deeded to the state.

Between the winter of 1936 and summer 1940, little action takes place. On April 20, 1937, more than a year since the matter was last discussed by the council, the project is again brought up. City Attorney Walker Pierce is instructed to gather additional in-
formation from the adjutant general about actions needed to make application. The possibility of a bond issue also is discussed, but no action taken. On January 23, 1940, a letter outlining requirements for fulfilling an armory appropriation request is received. Addressed to “all concerned,” Adj. Gen. Lewis M. Means notes that both an unencumbered deed and copies of blueprints are required.

**Interest Picks Up Again**

By the summer of 1940, stronger interest develops toward fulfilling hopes for an armory. In large part this is because the Missouri National Guard has threatened to move Company M from Fayette to Chillicothe. At the time, Chillicothe was more capable of providing adequate facilities, including a larger armory (built in 1940) with more weapon storage and better outdoor space in which to train.

The threat of moving Company M particularly concerns city since the company brings in an estimated $16,000 a year to the community, with each dollar passed around seven times. Reacting to possible financial harm if a new armory is not constructed, the city’s leadership endorses the proposal.

Shortly after learning of the possible move, Howard County agrees to contribute $5,000 for the project on condition the city contribute the same amount. County officials say they’ll commit to pay half of the $5,000 in 1940 and the remaining half in 1941. Fund approval is voted on June 17, 1940, by the three-member county court (now known as the county commission).


Central College’s administration also demonstrates interest in the project with a telegram from college President Robert H. Ruff to Mayor Todd on June 25, 1940, stating: “Central College is ready to cooperate in this, as in other Fayette and community enterprises. It stands ready to make available without cost a suitable site for armory purposes.”

On July 2, 1940, the council approves an ordinance to set aside $5,000 for the project by Aug. 25, 1940. However, an ongoing debate develops about the best location. In addition to earlier proposed locations at the college and the city park, other sites discussed are: 1) the Clark lot located at Mulberry and Elm Streets (including part of Mrs. S. Y. Tatum’s property); 2) a lot located facing Elm Street behind the Brockman Poultry House and the Mattingly Brother’s store; and 3) a lot at West Davis Street and Linn Avenue, a block from the square, owned by John Wisely, plus a lot owned by Mrs. Letha Scott (i.e., two adjoining lots that would have been made into one). The park location, selected by the Fayette Chamber of Commerce, is recommended by a vote of chamber members 18 to 8 in the summer of 1940.

On July 12, 1940, architects R. B. Deering of Columbia; I. Bundar of Kirksville; and Hal Lynch of Clayton submit proposals, but no action is taken to employ an architect.

**Council Votes Campus Location**

The city council OKs the campus location on July 12, 1940, as the college had agreed to donate the land which would cost the city nothing. The park site involves some cost, but presumably the chamber is unaware of this fact when they vote on July 9, 1940. It’s noteworthy that the group presumed the park location to be free of charge, but now learns otherwise. It’s not until Army officer Col. Per Ramee visits Fayette and reviews suggested locations, that it’s officially determined that the site should be at the college location. (It’s reported following his visit that he chose the land on Mulberry as the most suitable.)

This site officially is selected by the council on August 2, 1940, as per recommendation of Ramee. The city engineer is then instructed to provide the city attorney with the date and measurements for a deed. When received, the deed will go before the college’s Board of Curators (now Trustees). An internal college document notes that Carl Slagle surveyed the property located at NE ¼ of NW Sec. 11-50-16 on August 7, 1940.

A letter from President Ruff on Sept. 24, 1940, asks John A. Norman of the St. Louis Union Trust Company to clear the title of a tract of land near the football practice field. Six days later Ruff receives a letter from H. J. Miller of the St. Louis Trust Company in which Miller wonders that — if the local guard unit is called-up and if there is a new unit to replace it — would it adversely impact college enrollment? Ruff in turn asks for additional feedback from Miller. In subsequent correspondence, Miller notes there’s a request for a partial release of the deed which is needed to build an armory, but explains that because the mortgage does not allow for partial releases, all bond holders need to be contacted (a lengthy process) to enable full release.

Frederic A. Culmer, Ph.D., a faculty member and legal
representative for the college, responds to Miller in a letter dated October 3, 1940, stating that Missouri requires a clear title and no easements for WPA projects, such as the proposed armory. On the subject of Miller’s worries that the armory could adversely impact the college, Culmer recalls that the institution has used the current armory for dances and other events, thereby making it an asset.

In all, Culmer does not see any disadvantage to Central having the armory, and notes possible advantages — such as the building’s potential for use as a gym and use for social events. But unexpectedly, on October 6, 1940, the county court revokes its offer to contribute $5,000 for the project (which had been conditional on Fayette also contributing $5,000). The new vote is for the county to not contribute.

On October 7, 1940, an unsigned letter, presumably from someone at the college to Trust Officer Miller, states that the writer has consulted Col. B. I. Lawrence of Company M, noting that Lawrence has been working hard to ensure the proposed armory be built on college land. Having been a Central faculty member since 1924, Lawrence estimates the cost of the completed armory at $75,000 (more than $1.3 million in 2017 dollars).

Cost Estimated at $75,000

In Lawrence’s personnel file at CMU, there is a three-page proposal for a community auditorium and National Guard armory. (See rendition on Page 12.) The proposal notes that Columbia’s armory serves both as a community hall and an armory, as do ones in Kirksville and Hannibal. Lawrence also states that each community could receive up to $5,000 from the state toward supporting an armory, but since not as many cities had applied, Fayette could receive up to $6,667. He suggests that if the community would provide $5,000 of the state toward the armory, they could receive $8,000 in cash and services, for a total of $8,000 in cash and services, it could secure a WPA grant for an armory in Fayette. He also points out that the regimental headquarters for the 138th Infantry is in St. Louis and that a million dollar facility is being built there as “naturally the city of St. Louis desires to have the complete regiment there.”

Lawrence also suggests that Company M’s economic impact has brought more than $10,000 a year to Fayette and, that during the company’s life-span, it has generated close to $150,000 for the local economy. (Information in Lawrence’s file suggests his proposal was written sometime in 1937.) He goes on to note that other communities such as Trenton, Carrollton, Brookfield and Moberly would also like to house the guard companies in their communities, stating that if an armory is built it could be enlarged and thus receive additional federal funds.

His memo also notes that if such an armory was built, and if the County Court and the city council would undertake half the sponsors’ share, the building could then be constructed, with ongoing expenses covered by the state and federal government. He closes his argument by saying, “Can we afford to make this contribution of $8,000 to secure it while the state will help us? Can we afford not to make this contribution?”

In a supplement to his proposal, Lawrence includes data on the project:

- Necessary to secure OK of Adjutant General & grant of $8,000 by state.
- Necessary town provide site and $5,000 additional
- Discuss $40,000 appropriation already approved by PWA.
- Discuss possibility of provisions for light and water counting toward $5,000 payment.
- Offer to secure 7.54 acres opposite athletic field for $600.

On Oct. 29, 1940, Frederic A. Culmer requests in a letter to Dr. Cyrus E. Burford, chairman of Central’s Board of Curators, that the deed be executed to allow Central to transfer the land. The college then proceeds to deed the designated site near the athletic fields as requested. (This action was later voided when the location is changed to the city park.)

H. J. Miller then notifies Culmer, in a letter dated Oct. 29, 1940, that a partial release of deed has been sent to show to National Guard authorities. A Deed of Partial Release, enclosed in Miller’s letter, notes: “small parcel located in the northwest quarter of the northeast quarter of section eleven (11), township fifty (50) and range sixteen (16) in Howard County, Mo., con-
taining one and 26/100 acres more or less bounded by survey as follows: Beginning at a stake on the east side of Mulberry Street in the City of Fayette, said point being (1) S. 30° E, 198 feet, (2) 45° E, 158.4 feet, (3) S. 14° E 408.9 feet from the quarter section corner between sections 2 and 11 in said township fifty (50) and range sixteen (16) and run thence from said point beginning N 51 ½ E. 325 feet to a stake; thence N 45° W. 200 feet to a stake.; Thence S 47-3/4 W. 225 feet to a stake on the east side of Mulberry Street and thence along the east side of said street S 14° E. 200 feet to the point of beginning, together with all improvements thereon.”

As promised, trust officer Miller receives receipt of the deed’s partial release sent by the St. Louis Trust Company. A letter from the college, dated Nov. 2, 1940, also reiterates that, if the armory plans are not completed in a reasonable time, the property will be reconveyed to the trust company.

**Things Take a Turn for the Worse**

Plans go dramatically off-course in November 1940 when it’s learned during a council meeting that the armory cannot be built as an Emergency Defense project as planned. Instead, it must be constructed as a WPA project. Thus the armory would take a huge budget cut, compared with monies that would have been available had it been built as a defense project (as hoped). Because of the slimmer budget, the armory would take much longer for completion, with financial cutbacks required.

Just a few days later it’s learned one item being cut from the budget is a basement. The college location would require a basement due to the lay of the land. So the city park site now is back on the table. This location does not require a basement, making it more in line with budget cuts. Officials direct work on the armory must start by January 1, 1941. (Under the Emergency Defense plan, work was scheduled to start in June 1941.)

Surveying begins, with the WPA allowing $12 per month per man hired for construction. With a rush against the clock, with only a month until work must begin, the new site is authorized to be deeded by Fayette’s mayor in early December 1940. Location: “the northeast part of lot no. 23 in the Herndon Addition of Fayette. 3.2 acres. From a stake at N 17 degrees, 45 “East. 137.5 ft from the S.E. corner of out lot no. 23. N. 17 degrees west 400 ft. S 11 degrees E 296 ft. 18 degrees 436.4 ft. to the point of beginning, except a strip 30 ft. wide across the south end to be used as a road.”

That same day, December 3, 1940, WPA District Manager H. P. Phelan writes to the WPA’s director of Division Operations, V. W. Whitfield, asking him to expedite processing of the armory’s approval so sponsors can obtain the $7,500 contribution from the state adjutant general’s office. A sense of urgency is palpable since the measure must be approved by Jan 1, 1941, especially considering a possible personnel change.

The idea of having the Fayette armory be a National Defense project is back on the table as of December 6, 1940. In a letter to WPA administrator Col. B. M. Casteel, regional engineer A. P. Merrall recommends he obtain a letter from the adjutant general stating the proposed Fayette armory is important for military purposes and asking he forward the letter to the Project Control division. Such a statement of the armory’s military importance in the hands of the proper persons might enable the undertaking to be considered as a National Defense project.

Because of delays in the plans and the uncertain location resulting from funding changes, H. J. Miller from St. Louis Trust, in a December 9, 1940, letter, inquires of Central’s Fredric A. Culmer about the status of the released acreage. The same day, Culmer writes Miller asking him to kindly cancel the partial release for the land deed, this for the same reasons the trust company inquired as to the state of the deed (i.e., the land will no longer be used for the proposed armory). The site Culmer explains has been moved as a result of the change in funding from Emergency Defense to the WPA, adding that an Army official has approved the 1.26 acre city park location because the college site would require a basement, something not provided for in the WPA budget. In addition, college President Ruff has fallen ill, so Culmer is writing on his behalf.

State Adjutant Gen. Lewis M. Means informs WPA state director Col. B. M. Casteel, in a letter dated December 9, 1940, that it would be appreciated if Casteel would do whatever possible to expedite securing the armory for Fayette. In a
proposal by architect Ludwig Abt of Moberly, the new lower budget submitted by the city for the armory includes:

- Labor: Federal total: $27,722 Sponsor (Fayette) total: $1,560 All together: $29,282
- Superintendence: Federal=$3312, Sponsor=$0
- Equipment, Material and non-labor costs: Federal= $6,810, Sponsor=$15,448.

- Total cost: $54,852. Federal total: $37,844 (69%), Sponsor Total: $17,008 (31%)
- Total man months of work: 590.58. Total federal man months of work: 567.51.

On January 22, 1941, a letter is sent from Fayette area engineer B.P. Weints to the WPA director of operations, Swan McDonald. Included are forms from a January 16, 1941, letter and a statement that architect Ludwig Abt will submit final plans and specifications to the WPA operations office when completed.

On February 5, 1941, District Manager H. P. Phelan asks, in a letter to the director of WPA Division Operations, V. W. Whitfield, to release the 701B form which he notes Whitfield is withholding. The 701B form apparently is being withheld due to a pending receipt which would verify the sponsors’ pledged funds. The receipt is ultimately located and attached as a 301 form enabling Whitfield to release the 701B form.

Throughout the next few months, in letters dated respectively January 23 and March 6, 1941, Phelan and Whitfield corresponded concerning eligibilities of the Fayette sponsors, in addition to exchanging forms regarding the armory. Phelan contacts the sponsors to further verify their eligibility.

**Hopes Rise as State Funds are OK’d**

After a long road covering more than six years, it appears exciting progress finally is at hand. On August 6, 1941. Adj. Gen. Means has the privilege of sending a letter notifying Fayette City Clerk M. D. Settle that the proposed Fayette armory has been officially awarded state funds in the amount of $7,500. Nonetheless this is contingent on the city and county each paying $5,000 toward the project. Earlier, a bit of a wrench had been thrown in when the Howard County Court revoked its offer on October 6, 1940 (originally made June 17, 1940) to contribute its $5,000 share.

However, at some point the county court apparently overturns its vote to withdraw its $5,000 contribution. Phelan is informed by Settle in a letter dated August 29, 1941, that the city and the county now both have set aside $5,000 for the armory, making it possible to utilize the state’s contribution of $7,500. As a result, plans are now in the hands of the WPA District Headquarters in Kansas City.

Means now urges the WPA state administrator, Col. B. M. Casteel, to expedite the armory’s approval process. He notes Fayette has $10,000 set aside, with the state kicking in $7,500.

**Rejoicing Short-Lived**

But the good news comes to an abrupt halt. The Armstrong Herald reports on October 9, 1941, that after six tiring years of proceedings, the armory project has been vetoed, citing lack of funds. Adding insult to injury, the previous 1940 approval was never actually implemented. On the same date, the Moberly Monitor Index reports the County Court again has voted against their $5,000 contribution. The vote, that was perhaps fatal to the armory, was two to one. Judge Robert McGavock stated the county doesn’t have available funds and that he is against it.

Fayette’s Company M had been called up in 1940 and was absorbed into the regular U.S. Army after Pearl Harbor. It never exists after that time, although presumably the old makeshift armory at Main and Morrison could have been utilized as in past years. Discussion about building an armory surfaces again after the war, but never comes to fruition.

There are various reasons why armory projects sometimes were not completed — perhaps due to lack of interest or just a lack of funds. Fayette may have been too slow in providing support for the bond issue and approving use of college property. Possibly it was because of not submitting architectural plans in a timely manner, or the incomplete 1935 application. Also, it was clear that county officials were unsure of the project.

This is in contrast to some other Missouri communities, such as Bernie, which were continually supportive of armory construction and thus successful in getting their facility constructed. The town was able to use its armory until it was closed in 2003. While no longer hosting the National Guard, it still serves as a community center. Bernie’s support has led to more than fifty years of usage and economic development.

What if Fayette had enjoyed the same experience? Would the community be stronger economically, have had more infrastructure investment in the downtown area, or in the town as a whole? Fayette still does not have an official community center, with walking tracks, open gyms and meeting rooms. Other spaces located at CMU, the public schools, Schnell Hall, or the hall at St. Joseph Catholic Church, must be used for events, often at a cost. There is no public gym for working out or holding community education classes. While Central Methodist did eventually build several fitness facilities, it was done mostly for the benefit of the university.

Whether Fayette would be in a different position today, economically or socially, is not known. But clearly — if it had been more like Bernie — it just may have been. A View from the Past

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Central College to the State of Missouri. Deed of Partial Release. October 29, 1940.
Fayette, City of. 1940. City Council Minutes. August 2.
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World War I Casualties and 35th Division Stats

In April 1917, the United States entered World War I. Nearly 750,000 Missouri men registered for the draft. Over 156,000 served in all branches of the armed forces and more than 10,000 were wounded or killed in action. Missouri contributed military personnel to all branches of service during the war.

Total American casualties in World War I included 116,516 deaths and approximately 320,000 sick and wounded of the 4.7 million men who served in the regular U.S. forces, national guard units, and draft units. The USA lost more personnel to disease (63,114) than to combat (53,402), largely due to the influenza epidemic of 1918. New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, and Ohio furnished the most soldiers.

The 35th Infantry Division (originally the 35th Division) is an infantry unit in the U.S. Army National Guard, and is currently commanded by Maj. Gen. Victor J. Braden.

The 35th Division was organized August 25, 1917, at Camp Doniphan, Oklahoma as a unit of the National Guard with troops from Missouri and Kansas. It was deactivated in 1919, but reconstructed in 1921 and served with only one brief interruption until it was deactivated a second time in 1963.

The 35th Infantry Division was reactivated and the Headquarters and Headquarters Company federally recognized on August 25, 1984, at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

Actions during World War I

After training in New Mexico, the 35th Division arrived at Le Havre, France, on 11 May 1918. The 35th served first, a brigade at a time, in the Vosges mountains between 30 June and 13 August. The whole division served in the Gerardmer sector, Alsace, 14 August to 1 September; Meuse-Argonne, 21 to 30 September; Sommedieu sector, 15 October, to 6 November. Men of the division spent ninety-two days in quiet sectors and five in active; advanced twelve and one half kilometers against resistance, captured 781 prisoners, and lost 1,067 killed and 6,216 wounded. The 35th Division had, as an officer, Captain Harry Truman, 33rd President of the United States, who commanded Battery D of the 129th Field Artillery Regiment.

Notable members

Captain Harry S. Truman (33rd President of the United States) commanded Battery D, 129th Field Artillery, 60th Artillery Brigade; Capt. Alexander R. Skinker, Medal of Honor recipient, WWI, Battle of the Meuse-Argonne, 138th Infantry Regiment; and Pvt. Nels Wold, Medal of Honor recipient, WWI, Battle of the Meuse-Argonne, 138th Infantry Regiment.

—The Editor
A View from the Past

War-time Plane Crash Near Fayette Claimed Lives of Four Airmen

By Jim Steele

The time was late spring 1944. Our nation had been at war for nearly two-and-a-half years and, as the calendar transitioned from May to June, Howard County residents found themselves glued to radios awaiting word of the pending Allied cross-channel invasion, better known as D-Day. It was to become the largest military operation ever undertaken.

But little did local folks realize that soon the war was going to come much closer to home.

It was Monday, June 5. The day dawned much as usual for an early June Missouri morning as those in the town went about normal routines and activities. Life in Fayette hadn’t changed greatly since the 1941 Pearl Harbor attack. People still came through the doors at Commercial Trust to do their banking and the courthouse hummed as residents and county officials went about their business. Nearby, across the street from the Post Office, flat tires were being repaired at Home Oil, and on the east side of the square, milk-shake machines whirred at Alsop & Turner’s soda fountain where customers could enjoy a few moments in one of Fayette’s few air-conditioned stores.

Rationing Impacts All

With auto and truck tires strictly rationed (think mostly retreads), plus a wartime speed limit of 35 mph, and with gas for most drivers limited to four gallons per week, there was no recreational driving to speak of. Those with essential responsibilities such as doctors, public health workers, farmers, truckers, etc., could get a bit more petrol, but even they had limits.

Nationwide, the Fifth War Loan Drive was under way and locally the Fayette newspapers carried accounts promoting that effort — along with word of Red Cross work, special drives for scrap metal and paper, Selective Service call-ups, and other home front endeavors supporting the war.

Most every adult here and elsewhere had to deal with those messy little ration books. Many commodities had strict limits such as sugar, coffee, butter, plus various kinds of canned goods, just to mention just a few. Even the number of pairs of shoes one could purchase in a given year was limited. Many items — such as cars, radios and appliances — were not available at all. Nonetheless, there still was a good selection of movies to choose from each week at the Fayette Theater (later in 1960 renamed The Grand) and of course baseball in the park and swimming in the relatively new Fayette Swimming Pool.

The Quiet is Broken

According to some reports, the plane apparently lacked less than 30-feet of altitude and about 100 yards of distance from having the chance for a safe landing.

The Quiet is Broken

One area resident who had taken notice of the squadron was Robert Carson, a farmer, who witnessed one plane drop out of the formation and quickly lose altitude. Although he was some distance away, Carson described the plane as dropping beneath the other C-47s with the wings wobbling and losing altitude fast. He was quoted as saying the plane appeared to be on fire as it spiraled into a grove of trees and then apparently exploded after hitting the trees, with fire spreading throughout the area.

Farmers First to Know

Another farmer who was even closer to the crash site was Miller Vroman, father of retired local veterinarian Kenneth Vroman. He had been cultivating corn in a field about 100 yards away and was quoted as saying he never saw the plane nor heard the explosion because of the noise of his tractor. Miller said the first thing he recalled was the smell of smoke and then saw a large motor rolling in his direction amid a mass of flames, along with a gathering fire igniting the timber. Another object that was
afire and rolling in his direction was the front part of the fuselage. Vroman’s father, Earnest, working a short distance away, was summoned and together the men started toward the wreckage but were kept away because of the fire’s intense heat.

**Explosion Heard Miles Around**

The two Vroman men were quoted as saying that one of the large tanks had exploded and then had sprayed gasoline over a large area at the crash site which was on the John E. Stapleton farm about two and one-half miles south of Fayette near Route DD. (It is the present site of Missouri Pacific Lumber.) The pair then went up to the Bonne Femme Creek and worked their way down the banks to some of the wreckage, but found no one there. Flames soon subsided and they proceeded to another part of the plane and pulled it away from one of the bodies.

Others who arrived early at the site said the plane probably exploded when it struck an 18-inch Sycamore tree and then scattered parts over a large area, with the fuselage lodged in the tree. Observers said all crew members were dead when they arrived.

According to some reports, the plane apparently lacked less than 30-feet of altitude and about 100 yards of distance from having the chance for a safe landing. The location was only about a quarter of a mile from the Stapleton home.

**News Reaches Town**

Later, several people in town who had been at the swimming pool said they observed the plane drop and some declared they saw it catch fire.

Word of the crash reached the Fayette business section in a dramatic manner. One of the large transports which had been in the flight was seen circling dangerously low over town according to the Fayette Advertiser, flying in a manner as to deliberately attract attention. Finally metal-weighted notes were dropped, with one being picked-up by Commercial Trust Company President L.W. Jacobs Jr. (grandfather of present-day bank officers Jay Jacobs and Janet Jacobs). The note read: “Plane crashed two miles south of town — afame — send help.” Another note was picked up by Pvt. Charles Walcott, home on furlough, who had just exchanged salutes with the pilot of another extremely low-flying plane. It read: “Plane crashed two miles south of town. Have wreckage policed.”

**Mayor Faces Decision**

Immediately summoned was Henry C. Rethwisch, a well-known local civic leader who had been elected mayor of Fayette only the previous April (father of Fayette native Braxton Rethwisch). In conversations with this writer, Braxton recalled that his father had to make a gut-wrenching decision as to whether or not to deploy the Fayette fire department, thereby leaving the city proper unprotected. (Equipment then was a small fraction of what’s available today and there were no rural protection districts.) Mayor Rethwisch quickly decides: Send the trucks.

Another who had to face an even more gut-wrenching task was Dr. William A. Bloom, Howard County corner, who quickly rushed to the scene accompanied by two other doctors with an eye to providing assistance should there be any chance of finding survivors.

Soon the fire department arrived and it was noted that within a short time from 200 to 300 persons had gathered at the crash site.

The scene was described by the Fayette Advertiser as follows: “From all appearances there was never a time when any help could have been given the crew. All of the dead were horribly mangled, dismembered and burned, soaked in gasoline with bodies burned beyond recognition.”

**Reports Estimate Six Dead**

Initially it was believed five or six airmen were aboard the plane since that was the normal size of a crew. Later it was determined there were only four victims on board. Arriving at the site, Dr. Bloom had found identifying effects on four victims but was unable to tell from the condition of the remains whether or not there were additional deaths. The following day the Sedalia AFB confirmed the number at four. Bodies were taken to the Gillespie Funeral Home in Sedalia after the remains had been removed that night. Later military escorts accompanied the bodies to the places of burial.

Soon after news of the crash was learned in Fayette, the Navy V-12 unit at Central College (now Central Methodist University) rushed a patrol of V-12 trainees to the scene under the command of Lt. R. A. Ball. The men formed a sentry line around the crash site to keep away the curious. Later that evening a group of Army Military Policemen from the field in Sedalia took over and formed a guard around the area and this was continued throughout the following day (Tuesday).

Officials from the air base had arrived around 7 p.m. Monday, about four hours after the accident was reported. The following day about 40 enlisted men from the base arrived and searched the area for crew belongings and for valuable instruments which
could be salvaged. They returned to the air field that night.

Resident Recalls Scene

Current Fayette resident John E. Stapleton III was a lad of around 8 or 9 years of age at the time of the crash on his father’s farm. He told this writer of finding “pieces all over the place” including a cargo door and a skull, in addition to other parts of the plane. He noted that his father later sent letters of condolence to the four victims’ next of kin but received no response.

Once families had been notified following the crash, names of those on board were released by the Sedalia Air Field’s public relations officer. None was from Missouri.

They included a 24-year-old second lieutenant (pilot) from La Cross, Virginia.; a 21-year old second lieutenant (co-pilot) from Great Neck, New York; a 19-year old private first class (crew chief) from Gobles, Michigan; and a 20-year-old private first class airman (radio operator) from Tyler, Texas.

It is not known what information was contained in the report following the official military investigation as to the cause of the accident.

Today only a small handful of local residents are still alive who recall that tragic accident on the day before D-Day. Nonetheless it’s an event which brought the reality of World War II much closer to home for the citizens of Fayette, Missouri.

Howard County Men have High-profile Roles as World War II Ends

Several hundred men and women from Howard County served in the military during World War II, but two names are remembered in particular for duties which put them in the national spotlight.

William J. Shaw M.D. had been a well-known Fayette physician since coming to the community in 1926 following graduation from medical school. Along with William A. Bloom M.D., he had been instrumental in founding and developing the old Lee Hospital located on the second floor of two buildings on the northwest side of the square.

Initially he was the medical officer for Missouri National Guard Company M based in Fayette and was called up for one year of active duty in 1940, which then was extended “for the duration” following the attack on Pearl Harbor December 7, 1941. Ultimately Colonel Shaw was assigned as a physician on the staff of Gen. Douglas MacArthur. After Japan’s unconditional surrender on September 2, 1945, MacArthur ordered the arrest of 40 alleged war criminals including Hideki Tojo, Japan’s former prime minister and a general in the imperial army.

Three American GIs were sent to serve the arrest warrant. As soldiers surrounded Tojo’s house on September 11, he shot himself in the chest with a pistol, but missed his heart. Dr. Shaw was among medical personnel who treated Tojo who later went on to stand trial as a war criminal.

Upon his return to civilian life, the doctor was given a hero’s welcome in Fayette, complete with a huge parade around the town square. He continued his practice until the early 1970s.

Lewis M. Means (see photo, p. 13) was a military leader and Fayette businessman (dry cleaner) who was active in state Democratic Party politics. He had attended (then) Central College and in 1922 was the organizer of Missouri National Guard Company M.

In 1931, Means was among the first group of captains to serve in the newly-formed Missouri State Highway Patrol and later was the state’s adjutant general.

Called to active service after Pearl Harbor, he eventually was named the officer in charge of West Coast military security. In that capacity Colonel Means oversaw protection provided for world leaders attending the historic San Francisco Conference in July 1945. It was at that event during which the charter of the United Nations was signed. He retired as brigadier general.

—Jim Steele
My Fellow Soldiers: General John Pershing and the Americans Who helped Win the Great War

From the New York Times bestselling author of War Letters and Behind the Lines, Andrew Carroll’s My Fellow Soldiers draws on a rich trove of both little-known and newly uncovered letters and diaries to create a marvelously vivid and moving account of the American experience in World War I, with General John Pershing featured prominently in the foreground.

Andrew Carroll’s intimate portrait of General Pershing, who led all of the American troops in Europe during World War I, is a revelation. Given a military force that on the eve of its entry into the war was downright primitive compared to the European combatants, the general surmounted enormous obstacles to build an army and ultimately command millions of U.S. soldiers. But Pershing himself—often perceived as a harsh, humorless, and wooden leader—concealed inner agony from those around him: almost two years before the United States entered the war, Pershing suffered a personal tragedy so catastrophic that he almost went insane with grief and remained haunted by the loss for the rest of his life, as private and previously unpublished letters he wrote to family members now reveal. Before leaving for Europe, Pershing also had a passionate romance with George Patton’s sister, Anne. But once he was in France, Pershing fell madly in love with a young painter named Micheline Resco, whom he later married in secret.

Woven throughout Pershing’s story are the experiences of a remarkable group of American men and women, both the famous and unheralded, including Harry Truman, Douglas Macarthur, William “Wild Bill” Donovan, Teddy Roosevelt, and his youngest son Quentin. The chorus of these voices, which begins with the first Americans who enlisted in the French Foreign Legion 1914 as well as those who flew with the Lafayette Escadrille, make the high stakes of this epic American saga piercingly real and demonstrates the war’s profound impact on the individuals who served—during and in the years after the conflict—with extraordinary humanity and emotional force.

Carroll is the author of War Letters and was the 2017 Center for Missouri Studies Fall Lecture speaker (sponsored by the State Historical Society of Missouri). —Review from the publisher

Missouri Armories: The Guard's Home in Architecture and History Paperback

The armory buildings in most Missouri towns are the unheralded local face of the Missouri National Guard. Home to a part-time militia within communities around the state, the armories provide hallowed spaces to Guard members and serve the public in emergencies. Robert Wiegers presents a thorough look at the architectural and historical development of these buildings throughout the state. Divided into six categories based on architectural style, he includes 185 photos with historical data in this comprehensive inventory of Missouri’s armories.

"Wiegers provides a detailed history of the Missouri guard from its founding as a French militia in 1751 to its current role as the Missouri National Guard. Uniquely, he traces this history through guardhouse architecture.... With nearly 190 illustrations and maps, Wiegers’s work provides an insightful narrative and visual accounting of the guard’s history." --Kansas History

"This work surveys the history and architecture of National Guard armory buildings in Missouri and looks at the Guard’s connections with individual communities in the state through the public use of armories." --Research Book News

Robert P. Wiegers, Ph.D., is a tenured professor of history at Central Methodist University, Fayette, Missouri.

— Reviews from the publisher
A Fayette GI home on leave sells war bonds in November 1944 at a rally for the Fifth War Loan Drive on the Fayette Courthouse steps. Photo courtesy of Jim Steele