

# Transitions

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## A Message from the President



It's been a long winter here in Michigan, but spring is fast approaching! If you have an opportunity to visit the cemetery this season, be sure to check the Friends website for **self-guided audio biographies** that can be accessed on your smart phone. You can also pick up a printed tour at the literature box located at the cemetery entrance, or download it from our website.

I'd like to thank everyone who came out to the cemetery last August to attend the **WWI Centennial Jubilee** program. The open-air performance marked the 100th Anniversary of America's entry into WWI and highlighted the war-time efforts of local citizens, most of whom now rest in Forest Home Cemetery. You can read more about the Jubilee on page 6 of this newsletter.

The fourth annual **Murder, Mayhem, & Madness** tour was held on two days last October. "Undertaker Chris" regaled an enthusiastic crowd with intriguing stories of local citizens who died in unusual circumstances. For more on last year's tour, read the article on page 6 of this newsletter.

This spring, Friends will again be planting flowers in several urns around the cemetery, as well as in Babyland. If

you are visiting the cemetery and notice any plants in need of watering, please feel free to give them a drink!

Friends is expanding its archive of Forest Home Cemetery photos, including images of families at a gravesite or general pictures of the cemetery grounds. If you have photos to share with us, please mail them or send them by email to [foresthomefriendsinfo@gmail.com](mailto:foresthomefriendsinfo@gmail.com). Original photos will be scanned and returned, and you will be given credit for any photos used in future programs or publications.

Watch your e-mail and the Friends Facebook page for new tours and upcoming events this summer!

~ Paula Christiansen, President

## Adopt-A-Veteran Progress

The cleaning and straightening of veterans' headstones is done by volunteers and funded by generous donations from community members.

To date, 29 veterans have been "adopted," with six more veterans adopted since the last newsletter:

Cpl. Isaac Robinson – Edward Bentley  
Pvt. Andrew J. Cory – Shelley Ramirez  
Pvt. Oren Hubbard – Judith Gager  
Pvt. Ira Purdy – Edward Bentley  
Pvt. Eli R. Rogers – Sue Lake  
Cpl. Ebenezer D. Jerrells – Denise Hammons

**Thank You!** to all those who continue to support our efforts to honor the veterans at Forest Home Cemetery.



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## A GLIMPSE OF HISTORY

**Ray I. Booth** was born in Greenville, Michigan, on January 25, 1888. He was the son of Smith and Rebecca Booth who, together with Ray's older brother, Jay, moved to Greenville from Pembroke, New York. Ray's mother died after a long battle with breast cancer, when Ray was 14 years old. When he was 17, Ray worked for the Greenville Bell telephone exchange on the night service. A year later, he moved to Owosso, to work in the electrical business. Three years after that, he moved to Shiawassee, where he lived with Warren and Maggie Serviss and worked as a telephone cable man. A year later, he moved to Chicago to study electrical engineering. And a year after that, Ray moved to Holland where, except for a short stint in Flint, he lived until he shipped overseas to fight in the war.

Although Ray moved around quite a bit, he frequently came for visits, and always considered Greenville his home. That's why he came back to Montcalm County to register for the draft on June 7, 1917, shortly after America entered the war. He was 29 and living in Flint at the time, working as a car checker with Buick Motor Company.

Ray was called up nearly a year later, on April 29, 1918. He reported to Camp Mills in Long Island, New York, on July 11, and 10 days later he shipped out to France as a member of Co. L of the 338th Infantry. Toward the end of August, Ray's regiment was assigned to the 38<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 3<sup>rd</sup> Regular Army Division, which had only about 20% of its original troops still in active service. The 38<sup>th</sup> Infantry fought in the bloody Meuse-Argonne offensive – the last great battle fought by the American, British, French, and Belgian forces before the armistice was signed on November 11, 1918. Ray died on October 12, 1918, several days after being injured and carried from the Argonne Front. He was 30 years old.

Smith Booth did not learn of his son's death until 3 months later, when Ray's captain sent a wire advising him that Ray had died at a base hospital in France. He received very few details about the circumstances of Ray's death.

During the war, Ray developed a close friendship with Fred Petchell, a fellow Freemason that he met while training at Fort Custer near Battle Creek. The two forged such a strong bond that Fred wrote a lengthy letter to Ray's father after the war, fulfilling a promise he had made to Ray. The entire letter was published in the May 26, 1920, Greenville Independent, and included uncensored details of the fighting as recorded in Fred Petchell's diary. The following are some excerpts from Petchell's letter to Smith Booth:

**MR. S.A. BOOTH,  
GREENVILLE, MICH.**

Dear Sir:

Your letter of the 16<sup>th</sup> was received and I was very, very pleased to hear from you. I feel that in consideration of the limited means you have had for getting any information about Ray, that it is my duty to tell you all I possibly can. It will be a genuine pleasure to thus be of service to the father of my brave buddy, sincere friend, and brother in Masonry.

Fraternal ties brought us together first at Camp Custer and friendship developed rapidly; while we were together in France, we knew that little news of us was getting to our folks.

As we neared the time to go into action, we realized that the soldier's chance which we were about to take, was that some, and possibly none would return.

Ray Booth, Frank Durkee, and I, being especially close friends, agreed and promised together, that he who returned should give as much information as possible to those at home. I am confident that, had I remained over there and Ray returned, my wife would have heard promptly from him.

...

From a diary which I kept, I will quote some of the portions that will be of most interest to you. Although my diary was written under difficult conditions, I find the dates quite correct. I will start at New York, as it was there censoring started.



Aug. 25<sup>th</sup>. We are in readiness to leave St. Bouise at any moment. There has been intensive training and drill here, but Ray and I and others of the "Headquarters Platoon" have spent it rather easy. We spent most of the drill periods in the shade studying "Signalling" and the carrying of messages. The 85<sup>th</sup> Division is to go into Depot or replacement service and most of us are to be transferred to other divisions.

August 26. Early today we left our billets and the French people who owned them. They had been very friendly and good to us in their way. We received our July pay in French money 70.80 francs. 5.55 francs then equaled \$1.00. We had a hurried last meal with Co. L of the 338<sup>th</sup> Infantry and 170 of us privates marched about five miles to Ponily where we exchanged our Enfield rifles for Springfields, bid good-bye to our service hats and got steel helmets, then loaded into French box cars again.

....

Sept. 5<sup>th</sup>. Orders to move came after supper last night. We were hurriedly equipped if possible with the required full equipment. Most of us who had come from the 85<sup>th</sup> Division were without tents. At 10 p.m. last night we started our first night march with the 3d Div. We hiked all night with a lot of starting and stopping. It was raining and dark. Just before daylight we climbed a big hill and camped in a woods. We were wet and tired and soon all soundly asleep in spite of the steady rain.

....

Sept. 10. . . Every march seems harder. The old men in the company do so much growling that we recruits feel we are doing very good. The rockets and flares used on the front seem only a few kilometers in front of us. The roads are jammed with all kinds of wagons and trucks. We hike a lot thru fields and in roadside ditches. It was hard wading thru some of the mud getting into this camping place.

Sept. 11. I wonder that any of us stuck thru the march last night. We got one rest about 10:30 p.m. and for the rest of the night we were on our feet pushing forward when a place could be found for us to get thru. The roads were in bad condition from rain and shell fire. Artillery ration wagons, trucks, and automobiles were trying to get forward or back. The St. Mihiel drive was about to start and we were in reserve. We saw and heard the barrage commence at 1 a.m.

....

Sept. 15, 16, 17. Camped in woods. Not much to do except sleep and rest. We are short of food. In one of our foraging trips Ray and I found a potato field and got away with enough to supply our needs while at this camp.

....

Sept. 25. We are packed and waiting for darkness to cover our moving. The big allied barrage and general preparation for the Meuse-Argonne Drive starts tonight and we are in reserve. . . . While here, Ray and I became partners in a wrist watch. The watch I took over got mud in it and stopped. The straps on Ray's watch wore out so we put his watch and my strap together and wore it turn about. We were issued overcoats here.

Sept. 26. 8 a.m. Long, hard march last night. The barrage was great and is still going. We go forward at 9 a.m. and march until 7 p.m. thru old Verdun battlefield. Nothing seems left that could be destroyed. We see several air flights. We camp in woods that has been completely destroyed by shell fire.

The French and American heavy artillery are located all around us and are talking steadily. We keep in readiness to move quickly. The kitchen gets in late with little chow.

....

Oct. 1. Last night we rolled our packs at dark and sat around in the cold and rain until 12:30 a.m. Orders finally came to move and such a march is hard to imagine or believe. Mud was knee deep at times and very sticky. It rained almost constantly. It was so dark it was difficult to see the man ahead of us. The rough road was blocked with wagons. We push on steadily in a column of twos and each man keeps up the best way he can.



*American troops marching toward the front, Montfaucon, 10/2/1918*

. . . Dawn was never so welcome to me as it was today. At 6:30 a.m. we find the road is impassable ahead of us so we retrace our trail for two miles and cut across the open country. We stop half an hour for breakfast of corn beef and hard tack. We push on again in single file now thru and over trenches and the most deeply shelled ground we have seen. We climb thru wire entanglements and wind our way around large shell holes and mine craters. This was the first trench system of the "Hindenburg Line." Several of the large tanks were hopelessly mired in some of the large holes. We reach a stone road badly torn up and blocked as usual with trucks and ambulances. We see many evidences of hard fighting.

The wounded were cared for if possible but there was no time to bury the dead. The road was under constant shell fire. We follow it a short distance and turn off into a field and have an hour's rest and a dinner from tin cans. The boys on the line are making good gains yesterday and today. We push on again until about 4 p.m. when we camp in a woods back of several batteries of artillery. Two shells drop close while we are pitching our tents. We dig holes big enough to get in, eat some more corn beef and go to sleep.

...  
Oct. 8. . . . We have been getting shelled and gassed quite regularly but we have few casualties since we are dug in. The kitchens are hid near here and they have warm corn beef and coffee if some of us tote it up here and pack the cans back again. We are hungry enough to do anything to get food. It was serious and funny the other night when just after dark we were lined up getting our share when all of a sudden shells started dropping. We dropped quickly too, but every man crawled along keeping low until he got his chow before he made for his dugout.

...  
Oct. 9 . . . Soon after seven, we fell into formation, loaded and locked our rifles, and started for the front. After some confusion and delay caused by the fog, we got into our position just back of the line.

...  
Ray and I were detailed as Runners (messengers) for the platoon commander, 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Moore. In skirmish line we were separated by five paces from each other. Ray's position was fifteen paces to my right. While we lay waiting the time to advance, the Boche was shelling our area constantly. Frank Durkee got seriously gassed and narrowly escaped being directly hit by the shell that gassed him.

...  
Machine gun shells of seeming all sizes dropped everywhere and bullets began to pour through our ranks. The heavy old pack's weight was forgotten, also the sticky clay which clung to our feet.

Strength undreamed of became ours and everyone seemed to have just one mad desire and that was to get to the source of those bullets and shells. We rushed too fast and had to lay in the open for our barrage to raise.

Then we up and went again. We could not help but suffer loss even at the beginning. Sgt. Harding reeled with the blood spurting from his throat, but yelled, "Never mind me, I'll be all right, GO AND GET THEM."

A few steps further, I missed Ray in the ranks and looking quickly back I saw him not twenty feet from the advancing line he had fallen in. He was lying on his right side and doubled up, in what I learned later was the paralyzing shock of a bullet hitting a bone.



Map of France showing Hill 253 where Ray Booth fell in battle.



I glanced back a few seconds later and I thought he seemed to be getting on his feet, but just then a shell struck between us and the dense smoke prevented further vision that way. As I looked ahead again I saw my first German that morning and he had his hands over his head. As we neared the machine gun nest where he was, we saw others with their hands up.

Then suddenly it seemed that a stream of bullets came out of that very nest and several of our boys went down. Our Captain sentenced them for treachery and detailed an automatic rifle squad to execute them immediately. The squad named turned off at once and I never heard anything further about it for we kept on and so far as I can learn every man in that squad cashed in that day in the fighting that followed. I know how such orders were carried out and am satisfied that they gave those Boche what they needed most.

....

That night, of October 9, I helped carry one of our boys to the First Aid Station and in the dark I searched the place where Ray fell. I also made a thorough search both there and among the dead and wounded at the station in daylight the next day. The doctor said that a Booth had been sent to the hospital. It was several days later and after much inquiry I found two fellows who had seen Ray at the First Aid and had talked with him there. As I told you before, they reported he had been hit in the right shoulder; he had walked in and was feeling so strong he wanted to walk on to the Field Hospital. Another of the boys who was wounded and returned to our Company up in Germany, reported the same details regarding Ray. I was unable to get any news of him whatever after he reached the hospital. The place where he fell was on the north slope of Hill 253, about eight miles north and slightly west of Montfaucon, or three miles north and east of the village Cierges.

During all the hard marching, Ray never fell out once. He was always in his place; at the end of the hike when many men, who were seemingly much stronger than he physically, fell out from exhaustion, it was his nerve and grit that pulled him through so much of it. He seemed to do less kicking than most of us. He talked always of the most cheerful side of things and many times during the last few weeks we were together he said, "The fighting will stop before we have much of it to do." He was confident that peace arrangements were near.

Although he has left his physical body somewhere in France, Ray ever seems to be not far away. He seems near and the same spirit that spoke to me in France through Ray's physical being speaks to me now and has seemed to urge me on in writing this to you.

I still have the watch that belonged to him and which we arranged to carry by turns. I will mail it to you with this letter. I feel that you will appreciate it and that Ray would have it sent to you. It means a lot to me, but as his father, it will mean infinitely more to you. ...

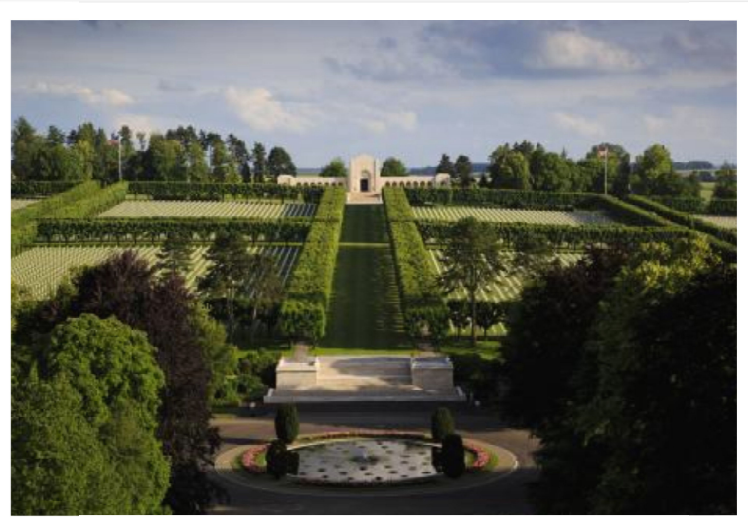
Sincerely yours,  
**FRED W. PETCHELL**

On November 6, 1919, the newly formed Greenville American Legion post was renamed in Ray's memory and remains today the Ray I. Booth Post, No. 101.

Although Ray was originally buried in the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery in France, his body was transferred back to the States 2-1/2 years later, and he was reinterred at Forest Home Cemetery on June 8, 1921.

Stores and factories were closed for the afternoon of the funeral, and all events of everyday life were suspended in Ray's honor. Nearly everyone in Greenville who owned a car, offered its use for the funeral procession, which turned out to be one of the longest funeral processions the City had ever seen:

"All along the line people viewed the procession and as the cortege passed, men bared their heads and all faces wore a look that told of love and reverence for these boys who gave their lives in the cause of democracy and who helped, each in his own way, to hurl back the German hordes that for a time threatened the liberty of the whole world." [Greenville Independent, June 8, 1921.]



*The Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery is the final resting place to more than 14,000 Americans that gave their lives in WWI.*

# WWI Centennial Jubilee Provides Entertaining Look at Local History

As the haunting notes of Taps echoed through the hills of Forest Home Cemetery on a Sunday afternoon last August, the WWI Centennial Jubilee came to a somber conclusion with the roll call of WWI veterans buried at Forest Home Cemetery. The program, commemorating the 100-year anniversary of America's entry into WWI, was created and hosted by Friends of Forest Home Cemetery, and featured popular WWI-era songs such as "Over There" and "It's a Long Way to Tipperary," intermingled with skits highlighting how the war affected local citizens.

Each of the roles was thoroughly researched using archived issues of The Daily News (then the Greenville Independent) and other online sources. In addition, many local musicians and actors donated their talents to make the program a success.

Valerie VanderMark, who recently retired as Performing Arts Coordinator for Montcalm Community College, coordinated the music program and added her voice to the group of veteran singers including Deb Dieckman, Mark Dombroske, Kathleen Dunne, Ryan Garlick, Charlotte Lothian, Larry Moss, and Greg VanderMark. Accompanying the singers were Andrew Smith on drums, Cory Smith on trumpet, Kevin Cook on Baritone Horn, Jean Hudson on piccolo, and Charlotte Lothian on cello.

Dressed in period costumes, veteran actors provided a dramatic flair as they recounted stories from the viewpoint of local citizens buried at Forest Home Cemetery. Carolyn Dombroske portrayed Miss Mary Fish who shared a letter that she had received from one of her former students, Oscar Fowler (portrayed by Cory Smith) who had fought in the Meuse-Argonne offensive at the end of the war. Another vignette featured the colorful story of Mrs. Bessie Bierman, as told by her mother, Alice Wilson (portrayed by Briana Herzog). Bessie grew up in Greenville, then later moved to Chicago to start her own detective agency. "Mrs. B" became the only female member of the American Protective League,



which was tasked with rooting out spies and German sympathizers. At its peak, the American Protective League had 250,000 volunteer members nationwide.

One of the most memorable stories was told by Smith Booth (portrayed by Spence Tower), the father of Ray I. Booth, who was killed during the war and in whose memory the local American Legion Post is named. (See story on pages 2-5.)

Other stories included Teresa Ranney (as told by her son, George Ranney, portrayed by Mike Walsh), who empowered women to support the Liberty Loan drives and fought for women's equal right to vote; and Emily Fuller (portrayed by Deb Dieckman) whose family moved to Greenville after the great Chicago fire, and who wrote an article in the October 30, 1918 issue of the Greenville Independent concerning the women's registration drive during the war.

The Jubilee was also made possible through generous in-kind donations from Big L Lumber, Fighting Falcon Military Museum, Flat River Community Players, Merritt Auction & Tent Rental, Nelsons Speed Shop, Pinups for Patriots, SureShot Pest Control, and VFW Post 3794.

## Murder, Mayhem & Mystery Before Halloween



Gray skies, misting rain, and colder temperatures did not stop cemetery and history buffs from attending the fourth annual Murder, Mayhem & Madness tour over the pre-Halloween weekend in October 2017. In total, more than 100 people turned out for the tour, featuring all-new stories presented by Undertaker Chris Hunter. Guests were led through the cemetery by Grim Reaper Ed Christensen, as they were read stories taken directly from the newspapers of the time. This year's tour featured death by gas inhalation, a car-train collision, a diving accident, a pedestrian-auto-streetcar accident, a drowning, arsenical poisoning by an abusive husband, and the shooting of a town drunk. Friends had given away 10 free tour tickets at the Greenville Expo a few days earlier, and were happy to see that all ten tickets were used.