

Veterans Day 2018

The Annual Town Report in 1919 listed 255 Chelmsford men and women who served their country in World War 1. Six men did not return, and their stories are being shared with you this morning.

Guthrie Stuart Colpitts was a native of New Brunswick Canada who emigrated to the United States in 1912 with his family and lived on Littleton Road near the Ginger Ale plant. His oldest sister Florence had arrived in Chelmsford 10 year earlier to work as bookkeeper for fellow New Brunswick native George Armstrong at his Chelmsford Spring Company. Canada and England declared war on Germany on August 4, 1914, and Guthrie returned to his native Canada to fight with Company G of the Fifth Canadian Militia. Three years later, on July 31, 1917, the British launched an attack officially known as the Third Battle of Ypres in the Flanders region of Belgium with a mission to eventually destroy German submarine bases on the northwest coast of Belgium. Allied forces pushed from Ypres toward the village of Passchendaele, about 7 miles away, but a few days later the heaviest rains in 30 years hit the area. A quagmire of foul-smelling mud swallowed up men, horses, and tanks, and shell holes that could have provided shelter were filled with water. Having made little progress by October the British called in Canadian forces to help. The Canadians made the final assault between November 6 and 10, taking the remains of Passchendaele, but the Allies suffered over a quarter of a million casualties, including 15,600 Canadians. The name Passchendaele became synonymous with the worst horrors of trench warfare in World War 1, and on **November 8, 1917** this is where Guthrie Colpitts lost his life. He was remembered at a Chelmsford Welcome Home Celebration held in June 1919, and a monument to the Canadians who fought in this battle was constructed by Canada in the 1920s at Crest Farm in Passchendaele.

Alberton W. Vinal grew up on Groton Road in North Chelmsford just beyond Freeman Lake. He was known as Bertie and lived with his father John, an elevator operator in Lowell, mother, and two sisters. The United States declared war on Germany on April 6, 1917, and Bertie answered the President's call for volunteers by enlisting as a Wagoner in the National Guard, serving on railroad duty. In August he was transferred into the 101st Engineer Train Regiment and his National Guard unit became part of a newly constituted 26th Infantry Division, later known as Yankee Division. General John Pershing was Commander in Chief of the American Expeditionary Forces in France and set up training camps there. In September and October 1917 Yankee Division shipped out to the port of Saint-Nazaire, then to a training camp at Neufchateau, about 60 miles south of Verdun. After six months of training, the division headquarters was relocated to the town of Boucq, 34 miles south of Verdun. The Germans made several raids into the Allied lines and on June 16, after their third raid was pushed back, the Germans let loose a heavy retaliatory bombardment forcing the division to leave Boucq and relocate about 2 miles south to Trondes. It was during this move that Bertie Vinal was killed on **June 19, 1918**. Stevens Corner was renamed Vinal Square in 1922, his name was inscribed on the World War 1 Monument in that Square, and the American Legion Unit in North Chelmsford was named Alberton W. Vinal Post 313.

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Pierre J. A. Paignon from Le Havre, France arrived in Chelmsford in February 1910 with his father, mother, and three brothers. His father Francois was an official with the French Embassy and they moved in with his brother Emile Paignon Sr. who lived on Warren Avenue. France and Germany declared war on each other on August 3, 1914, and both Pierre and his older brother Francois Jr. returned to France to fulfill their obligation to serve in the French Army. Early in July 1918 the Germans planned a major offensive to overtake the Flanders region between Northern France and Belgium and included a diversion to take place near the Marne River to pull the Allied forces away from their main target. The German attacks began on July 15 but much of their preliminary bombardment was wasted on false trenches set up by the French. On July 18 the Allies were commanded to counter-attack the confused and discouraged Germans, and on January 20 their commanders called for retreat. This fight, known as the Second Battle of Marne, marked the last major offensive by the Germans and a turning point in the war. The French Army suffered 95,000 casualties, and this is where Pierre Paignon lost his life on **July 17, 1918**. He was remembered at the Chelmsford Welcome Home Celebration in 1919.

Egbert Foster Tetley lived on Gay Street in North Chelmsford near Middlesex Street. His father James was an overseer at one of the worsted mills nearby and his sister Ethel was a popular student attending the new high school just opened at 50 Billerica Road. Egbert was appointed a 2nd Lieutenant in the 47th Infantry Regiment, 4th Division, from civilian life in May 1917 and was sent to France with the American Expeditionary Forces in May 1918. In August, about 19 miles west of the historic city of Reims, France, Allied forces established a pontoon bridgehead over the Vesles river for an attack on the German held town of Bazoches. On August 6, 1918, the attack began as planned, but the Germans counterattacked using spotter planes to report Allied positions to artillery batteries that pounded them with thousands of poison gas and explosive shells. The American 4th Division became trapped between the river and town when the pontoon bridges were destroyed, and many of their gas masks didn't work because they got wet in the river crossing. This is where Egbert Tetley lost his life on **August 10, 1918**. His name was inscribed on the World War I Monument.

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Valentine Edwin Ferris was a native of Swanton, Vermont, in the northwest corner of that state, but lived in Newton, MA, with his mother. After graduating from Newton Technical High School with an interest in the textile business, he came to North Chelmsford, likely to apprentice in a local mill. He enlisted in the service in April 1918 as a Private, and was assigned to 2 Company at Camp Meigs in Washington, DC, which was a training camp for special units of the Quartermaster Corps. In June he was transferred to the 304 Mechanic Repair Shop Unit in their Organization Park where incoming vehicles were registered, painted, marked, and equipped for service. While working there, Valentine came down with pneumonia and was sent to the military hospital at Fort McHenry in Baltimore, where he died on **October 11, 1918**. He was remembered at the Chelmsford Welcome Home Celebration in 1919, and by the Town of Newton in their official publication "Newton War Memorial."

George Ralph Quessy was the third generation of his family to live on Main and School Streets in West Chelmsford near the file mill on Stony Brook, formerly the Roby Sword factory, where his grandfather worked. In April 1917 when war was declared, George and his brother Randall enlisted in the National Guard. In August the brothers were transferred into the 102nd Field Artillery Regiment and their National Guard unit became part of Yankee Division. In September 1917 they shipped out to port Saint-Nazaire and the Neufchateau training camp. With training finished in March 1918, Yankee Division provided relief to French and American divisions at several front-line locations, ending up in the Meuse River and Argonne Forest region. A major offensive started on September 26 and they were assigned to set up a diversion while the First American Army attacked along the entire Meuse-Argonne front. Fighting was brutal right up to the last minute of the war, and on October 30 in the Argonne Forest, George was injured and his brother Randall barely escaped death. George died from his injuries on **November 1, 1918**, just 10 days before the Armistice. The Quessy family moved to Lowell before the end of the war, and as a result, the brothers were documented as Lowell and not Chelmsford veterans. It was realized before the 1922 town meeting that George had been a West Chelmsford resident all his life and needed to be recognized in Chelmsford. In response, his name was added to the World War 1 Monument, the West School was renamed Quessy School, and the West Chelmsford Grange commissioned a stone and plaque at Main and School Streets.

Exactly **100 years ago** the Allies in Europe, with the help of fresh young American troops in 1917 and 18, finally put an end to this long and bloody world war. Now the process of demobilization began and while families were joyfully reuniting, six men with Chelmsford connections had become a permanent part of our history, and we remember their sacrifice, here, today.

Fred Merriam
November 11, 2018