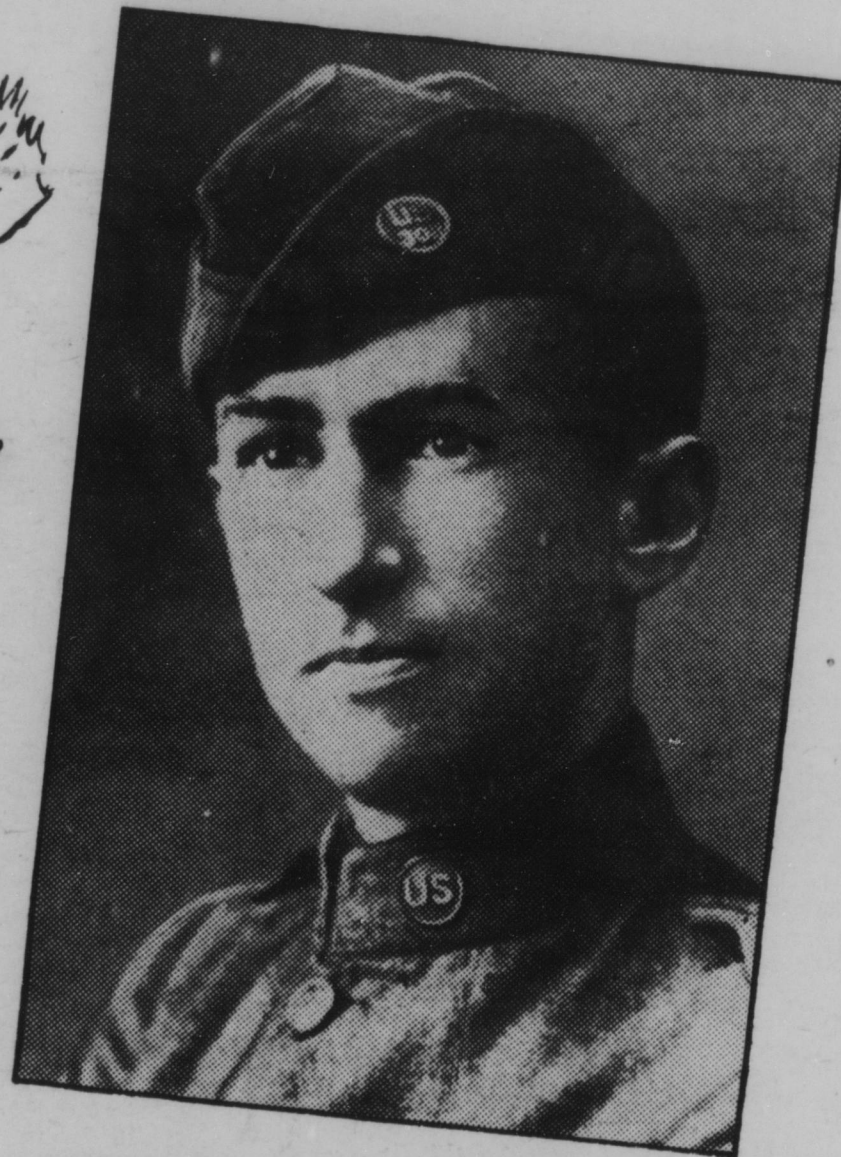


# Uncovered DIARY of the LOST BATTALION

A brand-new chapter in history comes to light after 19 years-- Private Jim Larney's day-to-day account, written under fire, of the most celebrated episode in America's part in the World War



Jim Larney as a private in the American infantry.

newspaper readers. Blasted tree trunks and mounds and craters of churned torn earth. . . . A long hard push up hill and down dale through acres and square miles of barbed wire, torn and mangled ground, trees and bushes and through a big swamp covered with creeping, clinging vines and underbrush. We are chasing 'Jerry' (nickname for Germans picked up by the 77th while training with British Tommies) fast. We ran into a machine gun and sniper nest and had to halt. . . ."

HERE the diary was soaked by rainwater, but the writing becomes legible again at an interesting episode:

"... lying flat along a path with rifles watching for a chance at Fritz. One prisoner came in. Then three more. They are old men—Landwehr (probably from the German 2nd Landwehr Division)—and said they were in here only two days. We questioned them on size and numbers of their troops. We brought in one 48 years old crying bitterly, and he continued to cry and wipe his eyes with a dirty handkerchief. He thought we were going to kill him. He protested in German that he was an old man with a family and was forced to fight. He says he never wanted to fight. He took out his cheap billfold and offered Manson (Robert Manson of Brooklyn, Whittlesey's interpreter for questioning prisoners) all his money if we would not hurt him. They assured him they would do him no harm."

The German's comrades were doing the 308th Infantry, Larney's regiment,

some harm, however, and the American advance through the Argonne forest was far from easy.

"One man," Larney wrote, "walked by with his eye bandaged and his face covered with blood. Another wounded in stomach. Others in sides and legs, ankles, knees, etc. Snipers and machine guns offering stubborn resistance in front of us. . . . We do not know as yet what is in store for us tonight."

THAT night he slept on the floor of a captured German dugout—"no blankets, real cold, no rest," he wrote, and "someone stole my chunk of bread. I divided my beans with Ficker, but saw none of his bully-beef, as promised."

If Private Jim Larney was not exactly elated that first night of the greatest American battle, neither was Gen. John J. Pershing. Larney did sleep that night; Pershing didn't. He was too busy trying to disentangle inexperienced American divisions and regiments that had got into snarls and failed to attain all the results hoped. Yet he ordered another try and with high hearts the 77th set out the morning of Sept. 27 to do its part.

"Went over the top at 2 p. m. today," wrote Larney in the diary, "and we are pushing on while Jerry resists. . . . We finally stopped in a pretty tight corner and located for the night. Quite a few wounded going back on the stretchers. Some died on the way. Pretty tough!"

He wrote huddled in a niche in the side of the trench; it was cold, but he dozed despite the sound of firing.

They were, he wrote, "over the top again this morning at daybreak"—knees a bit wobbly, but fortified by food and cigars. A few hundred yards, struggling, dodging, flopping through the forest, then the dread chatter of machine guns so well entrenched they could not be knocked out, until afternoon. Then, in a wooded ravine, they ran into a nest of the death dealers. But they rooted them out with bomb and bayonet and

settled down for the night. It rained and rained and "digging was so bad we spent a miserable night. . . . Our notebook," he noted with anguish, "soaked, cigarets ruined, and we out in the open in clay mud. . . . a night of utter wretchedness, misery, etc."

And next morning they awoke, "stiff and full of rheumatic pains and generally miserable, and to cap the climax we discover that Jerry has cut us off, and we are surrounded. They have broken our line of communication."

Jim Larney wrote in heavy black letters in the diary:

"Passed German cemetery this afternoon."

There were other ill omens. To the east of the Argonne forest, the first force of the onrush of 250,000 Americans had expended itself with results that, while good, were not all that had been hoped. West of the forest, American Negro and French troops had advanced even less, leaving a hole on the 77th Division's left flank, where Larney's regiment, the 308th Infantry, was situated.

Flitting into the forest paths they knew so well, had come men of the German 76th Reserve Division. Hessians. As Washington had caught their ancestors unaware at Trenton, now they threatened to catch the Americans.

Some of that dreadful suspense is reflected in the diary for Sept. 29, a Sunday of death and violence.

"Surrounded by Germans," are the ominous words heading the page. "Sergeant Major Gaedeke (Benjamin F. Gaedeke of New York, later killed) killed German officer. Lived about 40 minutes German sergeant, too. . . ."

Whittlesey's battalion was sore beset. A feeling of impending evil beset Jim Larney as he wrote in his black-bound book.

Next Week: How Private Larney's diary refutes a lie about Major Whittlesey.

ally going forward into battle! And forward they went, for at 2 o'clock next afternoon, Sept. 26, Larney sat down in a deep German trench he had just helped capture, got out the diary, and wrote: "These trenches have apparently been occupied for a long time, and this seems to be a front that has been a stalemate. We are to change all that!" No Man's Land had not daunted Private Larney, though he wrote that it "was the desolate scene so familiar to