WILLIAM FRANKLIN NOBLE SOLDIER IN WORLD WAR I

This is the story of the campaigns: Aisne-Marne, St. Mihiel., Meuse-Argonne in which my father William Franklin Noble, Jr. and his 4th Division 7th Brigade, 39th Infantry brothers-in-arms were engaged in 1918: I've related the particulars of those battles and tried to imagine what soldiers in the front lines experienced. It is not an attempt at anything more than this--a personal story of one man's small part in a very large war.

*

As Private William F. Noble waited that 11th day of October, 1918, in a foxhole somewhere in the Argonne Forest, cold, hungry and exhausted, the roar deafening as artillery shells screamed overhead, did he think of the coming battle or did he think of the battles he had survived since his arrival in France? How long ago that arrival on May 23rd seemed. Could it really be less than five months?

He remembered vividly that first battle when his outfit, the 39th Infantry, was put into the front line on July 17, 1918 to relieve the French 11th Infantry. When they were ordered out of the trenches early on the morning of the 18th the entire vast line, reaching from the Aisne to the Marne River, went forward in a counter offensive. Their objective: to drive the Germans back from territory they had recently gained in their Spring Offensive.

The attack went well for their part of the line. They had advanced two and a half kilometers by mid-afternoon when the 39th was ordered to take the village of Ourcq. The troops swept forward, cleared the village and took the hilltop northeast of it. Next day on July 19th, the 39th fought again, captured the village of Chouy, not stopping their advance until 5:00 p.m. They rested there that night, and on July 20 were relieved by French troops and withdrawn to Troesnes.

Noble recalled the pride he felt after the 39th Infantry successfully completed its first mission. It was their introduction to being under fire as they'd advanced toward strongly defended enemy positions, of exchanging fire for fire in heavy fighting. The 39th had performed well. He wrote a letter to his mother on July 23, wanting to let the folks back home in Oklahoma know how he felt:

"We are having great times over here now,' he wrote. " You are probably as happy over the Allies' gains as we are. The Huns have sure received a wallop that will be good for their souls and they are still getting it." Censorship prevented him from writing anything about his location or what he was doing.

He also remembered the lessons this brief taste of warfare taught them: how deadly artillery and machine gun fire was; how the adrenaline pumping as they advanced drove out the fear, drove them on, even as bullets whizzed by their heads, cut down others in front and right beside them, the broken bodies strewn on the ground they crossed. The Americans lost 32 enlisted men killed and 14 officers, 234 enlisted men wounded those two days of battle on their small piece of the front line. They gained seven to eight kilometers of territory.

How short the time was, Noble remembered, until the 39th was in action again. After regrouping with the rest of the 4th Division, the order came on August 1 to move up and relieve the 42nd which had seen heavy action on July 30th. The men of the 39th and its supporting machine guns were again in front line position. On August 5, the 39th was ordered to first take St. Thibaut, then cross the Visle River. Although the troops met fierce resistance at St. Thibaut, the village fell to their onslaught by 11:00 A.M.

The German position across the Vesle River, however, was deeply entrenched, its guns and armaments well protected. The advance was delayed until the next day when 4th Division artillery could be brought up. It laid down a four hour barrage; the attack and river crossing was resumed, but progress still slow, resistance still stubborn. By midnight only the 58th Infantry (8th Brigade) and some patrols of the 39th were over. The 4th Division suffered severe casualties in the four days of fighting: 4 officers and 69 enlisted men killed; 14 officers and 674 enlisted men wounded; 67 enlisted men missing. The 39th Infantry was relieved on August 7.

In a letter dated August 8, Noble wrote to his mother in a different tone:

“I know you are all praying for me and I pray that you keep on praying. I believe God will answer your prayers and has answered them. . . .I trust the time is not far off until a fair and just peace for all nations is concluded. Surely we will love each other and God more after this is over, for there’s no denying that all nations are being punished severely. We must forget malice and hatred for anyone and work for the welfare of all. May God help us all.”

The battle continued on August 8. With fresh troops of the 47th Infantry leading the attack, several companies crossed the Vesle River. Patrols of the 47th and 59th Infantry reached the Rouen-Reims highway above the river by nightfall. All that night troops in the front lines were subjected to attacks of poison gas, artillery, rifle and machine gun fire. They were forced back to the railroad. Next day, the 9thof August, an attempt was made for an attack coordinated with the French to take the village of Bazoches. It too failed, and the few American troops that entered the town incurred heavy losses as six German airplanes repeatedly bombed them.

Badly mauled, the 4th Division was relieved on August 11-12 and retired to the rear where they rested a few days, then started their march to the area assigned to the First American Army, near Reynel and Rimaucourt, France. In less than a month of fighting, the 4th Division’s casualties totaled 6,923..

This counter offensive by the Allies was called the Second Battle of the Aisne-Marne. The combined efforts of French, British, Belgian, Italian and American troops forced the Germans back to where they were in March, 1918. Casualties (killed, wounded and captured or missing) on both sides were heavy: French 95,000; British 13,000; United States 12,000; German 163,000 (estimated).

Noble’s only comment in his next letter, dated August 25, 1918, was to advise his parents “to look into the details (presumably in the newspapers), and we’ll raid Berlin, by heck. I would have to have days to even get started to tell you the things you want to know.”

Although the individual battles he’d fought were etched indelibly on his mind, Noble found the time and place of each becoming a blur. Waiting for the command to move out, he forced himself to place the events in order in his memory.

Next, Noble remembered, was the seemingly endless march to an area south of Verdun, France along the Meuse River. The memories of the 120 kilometer (about 74 miles) march were of walking with

full 84 pound packs through mud often ankle-deep, always wet and cold as the rain fell continuously, assembling the two man pup tent in the dark, sleeping on soggy, wet ground, eating cold rations. Throughout the march the column had to move frequently into the ditches next to the road to allow long lines of supply trucks and equipment to pass. Those vehicles often broke down or were bogged down in the mud, leading to long delays.

When at last they reached their destination, the 4th Division was assigned to U. S. Army V Corps. Preparations were underway and forces being assembled for the St. Mihiel offensive, which would be the first attack launched solely under American control and was commanded by General John J. Pershing. The objective assigned to V Corps was to dislodge the Germans from forward positions they had held for four years (the St. Mihiel Salient).

The plan was for V Corps to attack from the west, pushing southeast, while U. S. I and IV Corps attacked from the south, pushing northwest, trapping the Germans. Four French Divisions were to attack the tip of the salient and prevent the Germans from escaping. A formidable force of some 600,000 troops was being assembled: 15 American army divisions, nine in the assault line and six in reserve, and the four French divisions along with artillery and air support. Movement of both men and supplies were complicated by rain continuing to fall steadily from September 8 to 13.

Noble remembered that on September 12, 1918, the offensive began with a four hour bombardment of German positions by 3,000 artillery guns, all manufactured by the French. It was supplemented by 1,476 airplanes with the mission of neutralizing or destroying German air power. Attacking on three points, the armies advanced rapidly achieving all objectives by the afternoon of September 14th and closing the salient. Nearly 16,000 prisoners, 443 guns and large stores of materiel and supplies were captured. Allied casualties were 7,000 killed or wounded.

For months the Allies had been planning an offensive on several fronts to force the Germans out of Belgium, push them back on all Western Europe fronts and eventually break the Hindenburg line, leaving Germany no choice but to surrender. The sector of the front assigned to the Americans for this battle was in a heavily forested and hilly area cut by deep, narrow valleys, covered in brushy terrain, with rivers, streams and marshes. It was a challenging landscape to move infantry through and even more so for tanks or for moving artillery.

In a great feat of logistics orchestrated by Colonel George C. Marshall, over 600,000 American troops moved into place for the attack. Three U. S. Army Corps were assigned to sectors along the American part of the front. The III Corps was composed of three Divisions: the 33rd on the right, the 80th in the center and the 4th Division on the left. The 79th Division of Corps V was to the left of the 4th Division. The objective was to capture the German-held railroad hub of Sedan, thereby breaking the German supply line. The German force they were facing was the approximately 40 German Divisions in the Argonne Forest which had spent four years fortifying its defenses.

The order Cpl. Noble was anticipating came September 26, 1918. What followed was to be the last great battle of World War I.

When ordered into action on September 26, the 4th' Division's 7th Brigade advanced through a narrow valley, meeting increased German resistance as they approached the town of Cuisy. The 39th Infantry succeeded in overcoming the defenders and advanced to the next village, Septsarges. That day the 7th Brigade captured 1,700 prisoners and more than 40 guns. On the 27th, the battle opened with an artillery barrage which the 39th Infantry followed until they were stopped and pinned down by heavy

machine gun fire. The 8th Brigade replaced the 39th in the line on September 29, but the same machine gun fire from the Bois des Ogons stopped them. With ammunition running low, progress halted for the next four days.

As supplies and ammunition finally got through the nearly impassable roads and reached the front lines, troops were able to resume the attack on October 4. The 8th Brigade moved across open ground in heavy fog, but when the fog lifted they were attacked from three sides by machine guns and artillery, many of the projectiles carrying poison gas. Wearing gas masks, the 58th Infantry struggled on to gain ground around the Bois des Fays but were stopped there for the next four days under constant shelling. The 7th Brigade returned to the battle October 9 and relieved the 8th Brigade.   At 7:30 p.m. the 39th Infantry was ordered to attack. Wearing gas masks and stumbling over rough terrain in the dark, under heavy fire the 39th could not advance and withdrew, returning to the fight at 7:00 a.m. on October 10. Losses were heavy and many of the officers of the 39th, including all the majors were killed or wounded.

On October 13, 4th Division units were relieved by 3rd Division units, but the 47th continued to hold. The 4th Division was withdrawn from the front on October 19. During the Meuse-Argonne Offensive the Division was in combat for 24 days and lost 244 officers and 7,168 enlisted men killed or wounded. They penetrated enemy defenses to a depth of 13 kilometers and captured 2,731 prisoners. On October 31, Major General Mark L. Hersey arrived to take over command of the 4th Division.

Understandably, there were no more letters mailed home to his parents by William F. Noble, now Sergeant Noble, after September 18 and until October 16. On that date he wrote to his father, W. F. Noble, Sr. what is, perhaps, the understatement of the war:

" It's rather disagreeable at the front these days, but we have the knowledge that it's also hard on Jerry. This big drive is making steady headway and I sincerely hope it will bring about an ending of the whole big trouble, for surely there is no fun in it. This whipping the Germans is one whale of a job."

The Armistice that ended the war in Europe became effective at 11 p.m. on November 11, 1918, but fighting continued right up until the hour of 11 o'clock.

Although the shooting war was ended for the "Fighting Fourth" Division, it was not the end of service for their soldiers. Many units of the 4th were put into the Army of Occupation which marched into Germany, covering 330 miles in 15 days. The troops were then dispersed over a wide area to occupy Germany.

Sergeant William F. Noble was assigned to the occupation army and did not return to the United States until June 18, 1919 when he landed at Newport News, Virginia. He was honorably discharged from the U. S. Army a month later and returned to his farm near Tangier, Oklahoma.

William F. Noble, Jr. died November 11, 1979 at the age of 91 at Albuquerque, New Mexico. In his post-war life, he was a successful businessman, married Nell, his wife or 54 years, and became the father of three daughters. He is buried at the National Cemetery at Santa Fe, New Mexico.

****

Elaine Noble Reas
October 2018

WILLIAM F. NOBLE U. S. ARMY RECRUIT 1918

WILIAM F. NOBLE CAMPAIGN MEDAL WORLD WAR I

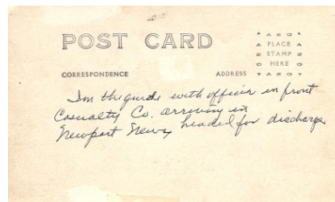
AISNE-MARNE; SAN MIHIEL; MEUSE-ARGONNE; DEFENSIVE SECTOR

SGT. WILLIAM F. NOBLE NEWPORT NEWS, VIRGINIA, JUNE 18, 1919

"I'm the guide with officer in front

(second on right) Casual Company

Arriving at Newport News, heading for discharge.



POST CARD

PLACE STAMP HERE

CORRESPONDENCE ADDRESS

Im the guide with officer in front
Casualty Co. arriving at
Newport News, headed for discharge

HERBERT DURAND REAS, SAILOR IN WORLD WAR II

Herbert Durand Reas, older brother of my future husband, Jack E. Reas, enlisted in the U. S. Navy September 30, 1941. He was 27 years old and unmarried. He had been teaching school after graduating from Wisconsin Teacher's College in Eau Claire, Wisconsin in 1933.

Reas received training at Norflok, Virginia , was assigned to Norfolk Naval Hospital, then on June 30, 1943 was assigned to the aircraft carrier *USS Bunker Hill* where he served until the end of World War II. He advanced to chief yeoman in charge of administration on the ship.

Bunker Hill was engaged continuously in battle operations from the time it joined the Pacific fleet in the fall of 1943 through October, 1944. The carrier supported operations against Japanese forces in the Gilbert Islands, the Bismarck Archipelago, the Marshall Islands, the Marianas, as well as raids against many obscure Pacific Islands held by the Japanese.

On June, 19, 1944 *Bunker Hill* was damaged in the opening phases of the Battle of the Philippine Sea. Two crewmen were killed and over 80 wounded, but she fought on and helped sink one Japanese carrier and destroy some of the 476 Japanese aircraft that were downed in that battle, During September *Bunker Hill* was part of operations in the Western Caroline Islands, then launched strikes at Okinawa, Luzon and Formosa until November.

In November, 1944, *Bunker Hill* limped back to Bremerton, Washington for repairs and personnel replacements. By the end of January, 1945, she was on her way again to the Pacific war front. In the remaining months of the war, she took part in the battle for Iwo Jima and raids against Honshu and the Nansei Shoto (Japanese island chain south west of Japan). In the East China Sea on April 7, 1945, *Bunker Hill's* planes took part in a task force attack that sunk the battleship, *Yamato,* one cruiser, and four destroyers.

Serving on an aircraft carrier in time of war is likely one of the most demanding duties in the Navy. A constant state of readiness of crew and machines must be maintained, the aircraft and machinery kept always in repair. The tense work of thousands of launches and recoveries of the ship's planes is stressful and grueling. In battle situations there is the noise and roar of guns and bombs exploding, the ever-present danger to ship and crew from enemy bombers and machine gun fire, Short hours of sleep, readiness and fire drills, long duty hours, the lonely hours of homesickness on long deployments, all contribute over time to a feeling of exhaustion that is bone-deep.

Bunker Hill's final engagement began on the morning of May 11, 1945. The American invasion of Okinawa was underway, and the carrier's planes had been launched. Chief Petty Officer Reas was in his office on the bridge when he was summoned below decks. Within minutes of leaving his office, the bridge took a direct hit from a Japanese kamikaze airplane and the office was obliterated. A few minutes later, a second suicide plane struck the ship.

Gasoline fires broke out, and explosions erupted throughout the ship. Amid choking smoke, leaping flames and chaos, men struggled bravely to save their injured shipmates and their severely damaged ship. ***Bunker Hill*** was listing, in danger of sinking. Only the heroic efforts of the crew saved her.

The losses were horrendous: 346 killed; 43 missing; 264 wounded. .Chief Reas was not among them. Once more, *Bunker Hill* made it back to Bremerton, by way of Pearl Harbor, was repaired and returned to service but never again to battle.

Herbert D. Reas ("Herb" to his colleagues, "Durand" to his family), was discharged from the Navy September 14, 1945 at Bremerton, Washington. He and his wife, Lucille, who were married June 23, 1942, decided to live in Seattle, Washington where Reas resumed his teaching career. He earned a doctorate degree in education and was a professor and dean of education at Seattle University from 1948 to 1963. The Reas family lived in Kaduna, Nigeria and Nairobi, Kenya from 1962 to 1968 where Reas was a Ford Foundation advisor. From 1969 to 1981 he was director of graduate management and dean of adult education at American University in Cairo, Egypt. He retired in Kent, Washington, where he lived until his death.

Herbert Durand Reas died October 30, 1998 at Valley Medical Center in Renton, Washington at the age of 84.

****

Elaine Noble Reas

October, 2018

HERBERT D. REAS, U. S. NAVY

DOW G. BOND, SOLDIER WORLD WAR II

JAPANESE PRISONER OF WAR 1942-1945

December 7, 1941, the day that brought the United States into World War II, was a sunny winter Sunday in Springer, New Mexico. I was ten years old. Returning from Sunday school and church that morning, I entered our house to find my parents and older sister sitting close to the radio in the living room, listening intently to the voice of the announcer. Their faces were grave. I listened for a moment, trying to catch the gist of what was being said, but it made no sense. Something about airplanes and an attack and a place called Hawaii.

"What's the matter," I asked. "What's happened?"

"It's war." Daddy answered. "The Japanese have attacked Pearl Harbor."

I had a dozen questions, but no one would interrupt the broadcast to answer. They clung to the radio for more details, as one after another, the terrible events were reported. Our family went to bed that night with heavy hearts, mourning our dead and injured countrymen and women. The adults knew it **was** only the beginning of grief. It was weeks before the full extent of the losses of life and a good part of our U. S. Navy Fleet were known:

Military deaths	2,335
Civilian deaths	68
Military wounded	1,143
Civilian wounded	35
Ships sunk	12
Ships damaged	9
Aircraft destroyed	188
Aircraft damaged	159

Next morning, there was more bad news. We learned from the radio the Japanese had bombed Clark Field near Manila in the Philippine Islands; Japanese invasion of the Philippines was imminent.

Suddenly, the war was close and personal to our family. My mother's nephew, my first cousin, Dow G. Bond, was stationed in the Philippines with the New Mexico National Guard, 200th Coast Artillery. Dow Bond was 32 in 1941 with a wife and three young children. He lived in Taos, New Mexico and owned a plumbing business.

After activation of Bond's National Guard unit January, 6, 1941, it was sent to Fort Bliss, Texas for antiaircraft training. Bond received his 1st lieutenant's bars upon activation of the unit. Seven

months later, the 200th was ordered to the Philippines to continue training and bolster U. S. defenses there. They arrived between September 16 and 26, 1941..

Bond later recalled, “There were no guns, or ammunition for that matter, until months after we arrived in the Philippines.”

When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, Bond’s unit was split. He was detached to the 515th Coast Artillery Regiment (Antiaircraft) to help provide air defense for Manila. December 8, 1941, Japanese air attacks began, first on Clark Airfield, then the city of Manila.

At Clark Field the Japanese destroyed 16 American B-17’s and 23 P-40 interceptors on the ground along with most of the base, leaving the runways too damaged to launch planes. The Japanese bombers, flying at 23,000 feet, were out of reach of the antiaircraft defenders of the 200th/ 515th Coast Artillery , but they managed to bring down five of the enemy fighter planes. Two men of the unit were killed.

“We had to wait until the very second that we got a Japanese fighter in our sights to prove ourselves. It was the first time my battery fired its guns,” Bond remembered 50 years later. He received a battlefield promotion to captain that day.

Two weeks later the Japanese invasion of the Philippines began. The invading Japanese Army, fully trained and well armed, brought two full divisions, five anti-aircraft battalions, three engineering regiments, two tank regiments and one battalion of medium artillery, plus strong air support. They landed on various islands, planning a three pronged attack they believed would be completed and wipe out resistance in 50 days. One of their main objectives was the capture of Manila and Luzon Island.

At the beginning of hostilities, the defending Filipino troops consisted of 20,000 regulars and 100,000 new reservists, many armed with obsolete World War I rifles. American forces numbered about 20,000 and several regiments of Philippine Scouts, well-trained and led by American officers.

As the invaders built up their forces, their bombing of Manila and fortified areas of Luzon intensified. For days Japanese bombers rained bombs continuously on the city of Manila. Soon much of the city, its docks, commercial areas and public and historical buildings was destroyed and burning. As the casualties poured in to the hospitals in Manila the decision was made by General Douglas MacArthur to declare Manila an open city in hopes of saving the rest of the city and its occupants. He ordered all American and Philippine troops to withdraw to Bataan on the west side of Manila Bay.

Both the 200th and 515th were assigned to provide air defense for infantry units retreating into Bataan. It was for an action of Bond’s unit in holding off the enemy at Balanga while Army engineers blew up a bridge during the retreat that Bond was recommended for the Silver Star.

At home in New Mexico we followed the daily reports in the newspapers of the severe fighting and increasingly hopeless situation of U. S. forces surrounded by the Japanese at Bataan. We knew nothing of the fate of Dow and could only pray he was still alive and fighting.

American/Filipino forces on Bataan held out until starvation, lack of ammunition, dysentery, and malaria forced them to surrender on April 9, 1942. No relief had come to the defenders either in the form of food, supplies, ammunition, or reinforcement. They had been abandoned as expendable, their sacrifice buying precious time for a nation sadly unprepared to defend itself.

The Bataan defenders resisted the Japanese 105 days against tremendous odds. General Jonathan M. Wainwright surrendered Corregidor and the rest of the American and Filipino forces in the Philippines on May 8,1942, ending the Battle of the Philippines. Guerilla activity by Filipinos and Americans who escaped into the jungle continued to harass the Japanese and provide valuable intelligence to U. S. forces in the Pacific during the remainder of the war.

American losses were about 23,000 killed or captured; The Philippine military, about 100,000 killed or captured. It was the worst military defeat in United States history. The stubborn resistance that lasted five months, had delayed the Japanese timetable for conquest of the Philippines by more than three months.

In Springer New Mexico, we read the newspapers, horrified and with growing apprehension, as reports trickled back of the infamous Bataan Death March that followed the surrender. The Japanese forced American and Filipino survivors of the siege to march 60 miles north of Manila along a jungle trail to prison camp O'Donnell. The prisoners were given no food or water, were beaten for sport by their captors. Any who fell or could not keep up were executed on the spot, clubbed, shot, bayoneted, or beheaded by their Japanese guards.

Some 75,000 prisoners started the march, and only 54,000 finished it. Conditions for the prisoners over the next three years continued to be the harshest imaginable. Lack of medical care, disease and starvation, killed many thousands. My cousin, Dow G. Bond, we were to learn much later, was among those who survived the Death March, then were imprisoned in jungle camps in the Philippines.

Late in the war, many American prisoners, including Bond, were shipped to prisons in Japan. Hundreds died in the holds of the prison ships, packed in so tightly they could not sit or lie down, deprived of adequate air and often allowed no water for days. Conditions in Japan were little better than the jungle camps as the Japanese continued their forced labor, brutalization, lack of medical attention and starvation of the prisoners until their liberation at the end of the war. Bond was liberated in September, 1945.

I have found no reliable figures for Bataan defenders who survived until the end of the war. However, the government estimates that 37% of captives held by the Japanese died while prisoners of war, compared to 2% of those held by the Germans.

Captain Bond was one of the few who survived captivity when so many thousands of others died. He came home with many physical problems which plagued him the rest of his life. He was promoted to major and after a year of hospitalization was given a full disability medical discharge. He received the Silver Star and many other commendations. He never talked much to his family of his

experiences, but kept in touch for the rest of his life with other Bataan survivors. He had a high regard for the people of the Philippines who had tried to give what aid they could to the prisoners. He returned there seven times after the war.

Bond spoke at Olongapa City, Philippine Islands, on December 15, 1983, at a memorial for the more than 1,000 American prisoners who died in the sinking of the unmarked Japanese prisoner ship, *S S Oryoko Maru* by U. S. Navy planes from the *USS Hornet* on December 15, 1944.

He said, "The young who died here gave testimony with their life blood to their convictions as soldiers and patriots. We, the living, carrying in our bodies, the scars of the conflict, well remember those days and our comrades.. . . Grant all nations the wisdom to avoid war in the future. But, if some are impervious to wisdom, always raise up the good as your mighty force to crush evil underfoot."

Dow G. Bond died December 20, 1991 in Taos, New Mexico at the age of 82. He is buried in the National Cemetery at Santa Fe, New Mexico.

****

Elaine Noble Reas

October, 2018

Dow G. Bond

DOW GEORGE BOND