

## Hollowell Survived the Worst of the Great War

When the United States declared war on Germany in 1917, the War Department quickly federalized National Guard divisions to quickly build up the Army. A young Army major recommended that non-divisional units from several states be combined to create another division, a division that would “stretch over the whole country like a rainbow.” Secretary of War Newton Baker approved the proposal and the 42 Infantry Division was created. The division included National Guard units from 26 states and was nicknamed the “Rainbow” Division. The major was promoted to colonel and assigned as the division’s chief of staff. His name was Douglas MacArthur.

One of the units absorbed into the Rainbow Division was the 117<sup>th</sup> Engineer Regiment. One of the units absorbed into the 117<sup>th</sup> was South Carolina’s 1<sup>st</sup> Separate Engineer Battalion. The battalion consisted of three companies: A from Marion; B from Columbia; and C from Spartanburg. John W. Hollowell of Columbia joined B Company shortly after the United States declared war that spring and took his initial training at the fairgrounds in his hometown. Hollowell had enrolled at Clemson College in 1913 to study electrical engineering. He was listed on the roll of sophomores for the 1914-15 academic year. That was likely the last year he attended Clemson as he was not listed in the next years’ junior or senior classes.



Hollowell and his company journeyed in mid-August 1917 to Camp Sevier in Greenville to join the rest of the battalion for training. In late August, the battalion traveled to Camp Mills on Long Island for six weeks of pre-deployment training. Now a part of the 117<sup>th</sup> Engineers, Hollowell and his comrades departed Long Island on October 18 for their two-week journey to France.

After a brief period of additional training in France, the engineers got to work building field fortifications, roads, hospitals, mess halls, latrines and target ranges. In mid-February 1918, the regiment was committed to the front lines where its men repaired trenches and continued to support the infantry. Committed as infantrymen during one attack, the engineers outpaced the other units of the Rainbow Division earning a citation from the commanding general. The division took part in four major Operations: the Champagne-Marne, the Aisne-Marne, the Battle of Saint-Mihiel, and the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. In total, it saw 264 days of combat. According to historian David Snead, the 42<sup>nd</sup> Division and its engineers served in France longer than all but two other American divisions and took part in the most important campaigns.

Once the fighting ended, the 117<sup>th</sup> moved east, into the region between the French border and the Rhine River and settled into occupation duty. Sergeant Hollowell, either from his time in the wet, mud-filled trenches, from gas attacks or subsequent events, contracted pneumonia. He died in Germany on February 13, 1919.

John W. Hollowell’s body was returned to the United States the following September. His parents, Mr. and Mrs. R. L. Hollowell traveled to New York to receive his remains and returned them for burial at Springfield Church near High Point, North Carolina.

