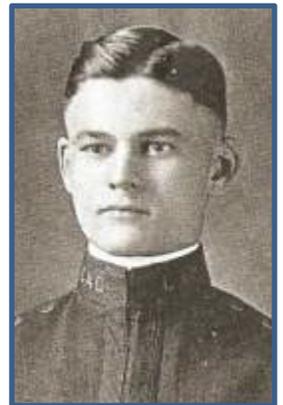


“A War Against All Nations”

In the spring of 1917, the World’s focus was on the bloody trench warfare which was grinding up a generation of European men. The United States, protected by the great Atlantic Ocean, had remained on the sidelines, reluctant to become entangled in European affairs, yet clearly sympathetic to the Western democracies. On April 2, President Woodrow Wilson traveled up Pennsylvania Avenue to the Capitol where he appeared before a joint session of Congress. He said that the Germans, through their unrestricted submarine warfare, were engaged in “a war against all nations.” In proposing that the United States enter the war as an ally of the British and the French, Wilson declared, “America is privileged to spend her blood and her might for the principles that gave her birth and happiness and the peace which she has treasured.” Congress declared war four days later.

Five hundred miles south of Washington, on the small campus of the young Clemson College, the senior class of 1917 responded to the declaration of war by volunteering *en masse* for federal service. David Eugene Monroe was a member of that Class.

Gene was a native of Marion and an animal husbandry major at Clemson. He was a campus leader, holding positions of responsibility as a captain in the Corps of Cadets, president of the Marion Club, commencement marshal, president of the Calhoun Literary Society and editor of the Agricultural Journal.



In response to the international situation, the declaration of war, and the senior class volunteering for service, the Clemson Trustees authorized the faculty “to graduate ahead of the usual time any members of the Class of 1917, who may be called into the service of the United States between this date and Commencement provided the record of such student is satisfactory to the faculty.”

Most of the young men graduating that spring completed their studies and participated in Commencement. Then several, like Gene Monroe, journeyed to Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia for Army training. Nestled in the north Georgia mountains just south of Chattanooga, Tennessee, Fort Oglethorpe served as a large induction center, conducting training in basic infantry skills. Monroe, in a letter to *The Tiger*, Clemson’s campus newspaper, reported long days of rigorous training.

Upon completion of his training at Fort Oglethorpe, 2nd Lieutenant Monroe was assigned to the 16th Infantry Regiment which soon became a part of the 1st Infantry Division. Monroe, perhaps combining pride in his unit with an awareness of the challenges still ahead, was quoted in a February 1918 *Tiger* article: “My Regiment is supposed to be the best the United States has, so we expect to put up a good show. You need not worry about my being brave. I’ll have to [be.] When you have 40 men under you, you have to hold a stiff upper lip. You would not put a man in a position that you wouldn’t hold yourself, and if you haven’t the confidence of your men, you are absolutely no good, so I will do the best I can, and I can do as much as the average man, I am sure. This regiment will probably see quite a bit of action, so I will be a veteran before long.”

According to historians Alan Grubb and Brock Lusk, Monroe was likely among the “first members of the Class of 1917 to enter into combat action, when the 1st Division relieved the French 1st Moroccan Division north of Toul in January 1918.”

In July, the 1st Division was assigned to take part in the Battle of Soissons - an attack on the flank of the Marne Salient - to halt the German advance. By this point in time, 2nd Lieutenant Monroe was leading a platoon from F Company. In the pre-dawn hours of July 18 the Division's artillery opened fire to begin the attack. Monroe's 16th Infantry Regiment, preceded by French tanks, pushed forward, taking the enemy's first line completely by surprise and capturing nearly all of its occupants. As the advance continued, German machine guns from the wheat-fields in the vicinity of the Paris-Soissons road and artillery from behind the lines swept the American line and men fell rapidly. "One-by-one," reports the division's official history, "the machine guns were overcome and soon the enemy could be seen retreating." Monroe was directly responsible for overcoming one of these machine gun emplacements. His Distinguished Service Cross Citation reads, "His platoon having been halted by machine-gun fire, Lieutenant Monroe advanced alone against the nest and captured the gun and crew. Although wounded in this encounter, he returned to his platoon and led them on to its objective. His gallant conduct had a marked effect upon his men."

By the end of the day, Monroe's battalion was reported to have been nearly annihilated, with the dead and dying everywhere and the wounded overwhelming the aid stations. Monroe was erroneously reported as having been killed in the action, but although suffering from wounds, later returned to action. Sadly, Gene Monroe would fall in action two months later as the 1st Division battled to clear the Germans from the St. Mihiel salient.

David Eugene Monroe was buried at Saint Mihiel American Cemetery and Memorial, Lorraine, France. A memorial marker was also placed in Marion's Old Town Cemetery. The Marion American Legion Post was renamed the Crawford-Monroe Post in honor of Marion Herbert Crawford and David Eugene Monroe, who fell on the fields of France within 24 hours of each other.

The 1917 edition of Taps, the Clemson College annual, noted that Monroe possessed "more than ordinary ability." One is left to ponder the contributions a leader like Gene Monroe would have made in his community, state and nation had his life not been tragically cut short in "a war against all nations."

