

# HERBERT J. CLARK— A COVINGTON WWI CAUSALITY

By Terry Krautwurst and Cindy Amrhein

In 2015, former LeRoy resident Terry Krautwurst would finish his six years documentation of sixty-six WWI casualties from Genesee County. As we have also found when we do military research, Terry found quite a few soldiers who were attributed to the wrong county. Five of them were Wyoming County men whose files Terry generously donated to our office when he finished his project.

We recently came across one of the “letters home” that were often printed in the local newspapers during a time of war. We thought our readers would be interested in the circumstances surrounding the death of Herbert J. Clark along with Terry’s research that found five of our Wyoming County men among the list of Genesee. ~*Editor*.

## THE RESEARCH OF WWI SOLDIERS

*By Terry Krautwurst*

Beginning in 2009 I began six years of researching, documenting, and writing profiles of the 65 men and one woman from Genesee County who died in service during World War I. On the 15th of May in 2015 I donated the complete project to the Genesee County History Department—some 90,000 words of original text and citations, with accompanying source documents for each soldiers profile, in eight large binders of over 100 sheet-protected pages each plus more than 1250 military file documents photocopied from the National Archives in St. Louis.

At the project’s outset, one of my most daunting tasks was to sort out discrepancies in the various county “honor roll” lists from the time. As a result, I also ended up researching soldiers from outside Genesee

County who were listed erroneously on one or more of the rolls. Among them were: Theodore Acquard, Herbert Clark, and Rollo Noble. In addition, because I was originally researching my grandfather’s unit and casualties within that unit. I also researched two other Wyoming County casualties who were with his unit Guy McKee and Addison Wallace.

As many know, nearly all WWI and WWII military personal files were destroyed in a disastrous fire at the St. Louis National Archives Military Personnel Center in 1973. However, a separate record group of files for casualties, known as Burial Case Files, were kept at the National Archives in Maryland. In 2015, they had recently been moved to the St. Louis facility where on four separate visits I photocopied all “my” soldiers’ files as well as those out-of-county soldiers’ files.

Many of the documents in the files are quite remarkable and are likely to have never been seen, even by descendants of the individuals. Some include eyewitness accounts of a soldier’s death; all include correspondence with the soldier’s parents or other relatives. In one case, the file even contained the soldier’s dog tags, which I photographed.

Herbert J Clark, as mentioned above, was one of the Wyoming County soldiers. According to the October 21, 1918 Batavia Daily News article announcing his death, he was born on August 14, 1892, in LaGrange, which is a hamlet in Covington (Wyoming County), New York. Herbert was the only



son of farmer Lyman Clark and wife, Caroline E Clark, and apparently lived in Covington his entire life before leaving for the Army with a Wyoming County draft contingent on February 25, 1918. The 1900 and 1910 United States censuses, as well as the 1915 New York State Census, show Herbert living in Covington with his parents and sisters; the latter census lists the family household on Silver Lake Road.

The confusion over Clark's home town and home county probably stems from the fact that his parents' mailing address was Pavilion (Genesee County). The October 21, 1918 *Batavia Daily News* article reporting Private Clark's death, datelined Pavilion, describes the Clarks' home location as "a few miles from this village, in Wyoming County, but whose postoffice [sic] is Pavilion." This is probably why Clark put Pavilion as his home address on his draft registration card, and why that town address also appears on numerous subsequent official sources, including casualty reports and Burial Case File documents.

This confusion likely also explains why Herbert Clark was listed under LeRoy on County List 4. There was no Pavilion category on that list; all Pavilion residents seem to have been arbitrarily placed under LeRoy.

The *New York Roll of Honor*, Clark's NYSS, and *List of Names of the Soldiers, Sailors and Marines of Wyoming County, N.Y.* all support Clark's designation as a Wyoming County soldier from Covington.

Note that newspaper reports and Wyoming County's list give Private Clark's death date as September 21, 1918. Several documents in his Burial Case File also give that date, and one gives the date September 29. However, most Burial Case File documents, and the vast majority of other official sources (*History of the Seventy-Seventh Division*, *NY Roll of Honor*, his NYSS and ABMC listing), list the date as September 11, 1918. Given the weight of those sources, and particularly of documents in his Burial Case File that give the date of his burial as September 15 and that place

the location of his original grave in the area where his unit was on September 11, which is almost certainly correct, not on September 21 or 29.

A searcher's report in Clark's Burial Case File quotes a statement on his death from another member of his company, Private Elk L Kenyon: "Private Herbert J Clark was mortally wounded by shell fire while leaving positions held by Machine Gun Company near Barbonval Vesle Sector. He died the same morning September 11th 1918 at First Aid Station at Blanzly and was buried there near the church."

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*Perry Record*

February 28, 1918

A party of friends were entertained at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Altoft on Friday evening of last week in honor of Herbert Clark and Hugh Moag, who left on Monday for Camp Upton, L.I., to enter the service of the U.S. army. Herbert was presented with a testament and Hugh with a fountain pen. On Saturday evening a company of friends, numbering about 100, were entertained in honor of these young men at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Homer Fisher. Herbert was presented with a wrist watch from LaGrange friends and a shaving kit from the degree team of Perry Grange, who were present. Hugh received a belt purse from LaGrange friends. A social time was enjoyed each evening and bountiful refreshments were served.

*Perry Herald*

March 12, 1919

**OFFICER PAYS A HIGH TRIBUTE TO  
PRIVATE HERBERT CLARK OF  
LA GRANGE**

Mr. and Mrs. Lyman Clark are in the receipt of the following letter from Lieut. Taylor, in tribute to their son, Herbert Clark who was killed in action.

Machine Gun Co. 307<sup>th</sup> Inf. France Jan. 4, 1919

Mr. Lyman Clark,

Pavilion, N.Y.

My dear Mr. Clark,--

Your letter of Oct. 14, 1918, addressed to First Lieutenant, 307<sup>th</sup> Infantry, reached me when our company was in the front line, on the banks of the Meuse River, a few days before the signing of the armistice. It was impossible for me to send you an answer then, so I sent a brief pencil memo of the facts to our Personnel officer, with the request that he



answer it for me. But he desired more details than I gave at that time and the letter came back again to me. This time we were on a long march, and have only recently settled down in what appears to be a more or less permanent abode. I am telling you all of the above by way of explanation for the long delay in answering your letter. I regret I have had no opportunity before now, for I realize how keen must be your own and Mrs. Clark's anxiety to have some definite word from one who was there.

Would to God that I could tell you that your boy has been spared. The night he was killed was a painful one for us, for three other men of our company were seriously wounded and several more slightly. I, of course, knew all the men of the company, many of them intimately, for I have been with them from the beginnings of Camp Upton. I knew your son Herbert J. Clark well and was by his side in the first aid station just before he breathed his last. It was a 6-inch shell that struck near him, very near, it must have been, but strangely enough it did not wound or mutilate him visibly, save for a few little scratches, while several of the men at some distance from him were frightfully cut. It was the concussion that caused Herbert's death, and so far as I could find out he was unconscious, or practically so, from the moment the shell struck, so that he could not have suffered any pain. At the first aid station everything possible was done by very competent medical officers. I stayed there as long as I could – several hours, - when the doctor told me he could not live. Herbert did not recognize me when I stood beside his cot, nor did he talk. I got word soon after we left the aid station that he had passed away.

This happened on the night of Sept. 11, 1918. Our company was just finishing a particularly difficult tour of duty in the front line, which began on the Vesle River, near Fismes, on the night of Aug. 29, where we remained for six nights – then followed the retreating drenches across the plateau in the Aisne River, where the enemy made another stand. Our company had all our twelve guns in position there, near a little town called Barbonval. You may be able to find it on a large map of France. We had lost some men during this tour of duty, - several killed and a number wounded, for the Boche was fighting desperately, and seemed to have plenty of artillery. But the morale of the men was fine, and they all did their part nobly. Although we were shelled as we went into Barbonval, - on the night of Sept. 5<sup>th</sup>, we had no casualties, and established our gun positions without loss. We all had narrow escapes during the next few days, - but not losses, and when we got word on the

afternoon of the 11<sup>th</sup> that we would be relieved that night we prayed that we would get out with all our fine men.

I was in command of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon, in which was your son Herbert. Capt. Hubbell conferred with all of us officers and we worked out what seemed to be the safest routes for taking the men out. At great risk we had a team and double limbes come up after dark from our supply section, four miles in the rear, so that the men wouldn't have to carry their heavy guns and tripods back with them, but could move more freely. They came out section by section, in single file, keeping well scattered, to avoid heavy casualties in case any shells did land nearby. One platoon got out all right, and my platoon was filing by the limber, putting their guns thereon, and moving along the bend, up the hill and to the main road. I had gone on some several hundred yards ahead with an advance guard, to find the road, for it was black night except when a star shell lit up the sky. There was a sudden whistle of a big shell and I knew at once it was coming close. I yelled "Down!" to the men behind, but it wasn't necessary for they had had countless such experiences and all dropped into the nearest gully or hole, or along the edge of the road. The report was deafening. I at once got up, called back to the men behind me to see if anyone was hurt. They called "All right!" My one thought was to get them out of there as quickly as possible, so I started the column moving down the road. It was difficult to check up in the dark, but as we hurried along each man passed back word to the man behind to find out if all was well. This section checked up all right, but they had no connecting link with the section behind. I figured, though, that the section following us had not finished loading their guns on the limber when the shell struck, were therefore several hundred yards behind us and were probably out of any great danger from the shell. Also, I knew there were competent sergeants in charge and another officer coming along behind, by the same route. My immediate job was to get the men with me into a place of safety that I knew, - a sunken road near Blauzy [sic], a little town two miles, (nearly) south of Barbonval. We reached there in a jiffy, and as soon as I had found places for the men I started back up the road. I had gone but a short distance when one of my platoon came running down the road calling "First Aid!" He told me that several of the men were badly hurt and were following him on our limber. I had several good "runners" with me and in less than a minute, it seemed, they had an ambulance coming up the road. How they found it so quickly, I don't see, for Blauzy



[sic] was a mass of smouldering ruins and the first aid station was hidden away in an old ruined barn. All this in the dark of night. Our own men had already done excellent work in bandaging up the wounded. Three of the men were painfully and seriously cut, - all over their bodies. Herbert was in the limber, unconscious. We rushed them to the station. The rest I have told you.

From all that I could find out it was the first shell that caught all the men. There were several subsequent shells, but they didn't sound so near, and all the men and officers seem to agree it was the first. Herbert was in the section behind me, and he, and the others of this section who were hit were quickly found by the men who followed them - men of the first platoon.

It was a heartbreaking occurrence, - to have this happen when we were almost through with that particular tour of duty. It was simply hard luck. There was no possible way of telling when the road would be shelled, or just where. Our men were continually under shell fire and it's a wonder to all of us that more were not wounded or killed, for they saw much action and were in the front line for long periods. The hardest thing in war for an officer is not facing danger or death, but it is losing men. When you have been through the jaws of death with the men you command, and see them obey every order unflinchingly, go forward into machine gun and shell fire without hesitation, knowing that at any minute they may be wounded or killed, even volunteer for duties of danger, always helping each other, - you love them and admire them more than you can tell. Our company is unusually fine, and the men who come to us from US state just a short time before we left Camp Upton, did more than their share to make it so. They are a splendid lot. Herbert was one of these, and his memory is held very dear by the men and officers of the company, for he was cheerful, willing, courageous, and a constant example of manliness and fine soldierly spirit. It was indeed hard that he had to be taken away.

I am sorry I cannot give you at this writing, definite information as to where Herbert is buried. His burial was taken care of by the hospital unit at the first aid station, and more than likely he was laid to rest near the little town of Blouzy [sic], where he died. Of this, however, there is a record kept, and I understand the government intends transporting the remains of all fallen soldiers back to the States. I will get this information for you from the Graves Registration Bureau. Herbert's army identification number was 1707388.

I am sorry, very sorry, that I have to send you this letter. But I know that painful as your loss must be, to you who have sacrificed your only son for the cause of right, there is surely some peace and solace in the thought that your son, never wavered, always went forward, always helped others and was a pride and credit to his company, his regiment, his country and his flag.

With sincere sympathy, my dear Mr. and Mrs. Clark, believe me to be

Faithfully yours,

Alfred K. Taylor

1<sup>st</sup> Lieut. Machine Gun Co., 307 Inf.

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**Final resting place: Burial: Oise-Aisne American Cemetery, Plot A Row 9 Grave 24, Fere-en-Tardenois, France. Photo by Terry Krautwurst**

#### THE BURIAL OF PVT. HERBERT J. CLARK

*By Cindy Amrhein*

In 1st Lieut. Alfred K. Taylor's letter home to Herbert Clark's parents dated January 4, 1919 he states he could not give a definite location for Herbert Clark's burial. This seemed to be true for quite a while. There are records in the file given to our office by Terry Krautwurst that indicate that there were four different burial locations. The first that speaks of his original burial is a grave location card. His burial date is given as the same date as his death:



September 11, 1918. Place of burial says, "Buried by medical," and as to location, "near the 307th Inf. 1st Aid Station at Blainzy [sic], Oise-Ainse section." How marked? Tags buried with the body? Was one fastened to name peg or stake used as a grave marker? All three of these questions were marked as "not known." Reported by 1st Lieut. R. W. Bolton MG. Co. 307th Inf.

The second similar card with updated information has more detail and says date of burial as September 15, 1918 at the Cemetery Church Yard. Although exactly where the church was located was a bit difficult to read, and after a bit of digging into French name places and WWI battles to help decipher the cursive it became apparent it was "Chemin des Dames Sect." This card was filled out by 1<sup>st</sup> Lieut. R. G. Nye, Chaplin. He wrote Grave #1, marked with cross, and yes, an identification tag was buried with the body.

March 11, 1919 his father, Lyman Clark, requested his son's remains stay in France. By a letter of correspondence dated March 14, 1919 it was apparent the burial location had not yet been confirmed. Captain Maurice B. Dix, American Red Cross writes to Mr. E. E. Rowe, Warehouse Dept. 12, Rue d'Aguesseau-Room 152, France that he requests the burial location for both Walter Klein and Herbert Clark of the 307th Inf. The return letter of April 19, 1919 from the American Expedition Forces Graves Registration Services replies, "Subject: Pvt. Herbert J. Clark --In reply to your letter of inquiry, I am very sorry to have to inform you that my field force has not yet succeeded in obtaining any definite burial information regarding this soldier. You may rest assured that every possible effort will be made to locate the grave, and, if necessary, a special search will be made of the area where he died and is, no doubt, buried. ..."

Further research shows there are 14 military burial sites along this 19 mile local road called Chemin des Dames (meaning the ladies path) that runs east and west in the Aise Department of France. There were three major battles along this road, the third

one (Operation Blücher) which lasted between August 2<sup>nd</sup> and October 10<sup>th</sup> 1918. Many of the burials are unknowns; which explains the difficulty in finding Herbert Clark after the fact. Here Private Clark remained until he was found in the fall of 1919.

The second disinterment papers do not say a church cemetery but, "Civil Cemetery at Blanzly-Les-Fismes," also in the Aise Department of France. He was removed from a grave one meter deep, in uniform, badly decomposed by this point. An identification tag was on the cross above his grave. Pvt. Herbert Clark was reburied on of September 9, 1919 in cemetery Seringes-Et-Nesles, Section E, Plot 6, Grave #296, Cem. #608. Herbert's family was contacted again in April of 1921 to let them know, "that the cemetery will be abandoned and body will eventually be transported to the Belleau Wood Cemetery."



**An example of WWI Identification tags. #1738023. These belonged to W. H. Eley of North Java and are part of a collection of his WWI items donated to our office by Michael & Kathleen Drafke of Illinois.**

They assured Mr. Clark that his wishes would be honored and his son would remain in France. On May 17, 1921 his body was disinterred again for a third time. The notations gave me a chill. "Skeleton disarticulated, features not recognizable. Uniform and burlap. Cross over grave only means of identification. New testament found on body." No doubt, the same New



Testament that made its way with him from Covington, NY, a gift of Robert Altoft, kept with him even in death. The disinterment paper work says to Section P, Plot 4, Grave #192, also Cemetery #608. He was reburied wrapped in a blanket and in a pine box. Disinterment and reinternment supervised by William J. Turner approved by 1<sup>st</sup> Lieut. QMC R. C. Worthington.

On October 19, 1925 a letter was received by Lyman Clark telling him of the American Military Cemetery where his son would be moved with the utmost reverential care where the graves would be, "perpetually maintained by the Government in a manner befitting the last resting place of our heroes." His pine box was removed from Oise-Aisne Cemetery, town of Seringes-et-Nesles, Dept. Aisne, France on February 18, 1928 and reburied, this time in a metallic casket. His permanent location is Oise-Aisne American Cemetery, Fere-en-Tardenois, France, which is west of his last location at Seringes-et-Nesles, in Plot A, Row 9, Grave 24.

By an Act of Congress dated March 2, 1929 and amended May 15, 1930 mothers or widows were granted a pilgrimage to Europe to view their soldier's final resting place. A letter was sent to Pvt. Herbert J. Clark's father Lyman in June of 1929 informing him of this. Lyman wrote back that they, "could not accept the government's very generous invitation to make the visit. ..." Herbert left no widow or dependents and his mother, Caroline E. Clark, had died September 20, 1924. But Terry Krautwurst did make the pilgrimage. He photographed every grave site of all the soldiers he had researched--including those buried overseas.

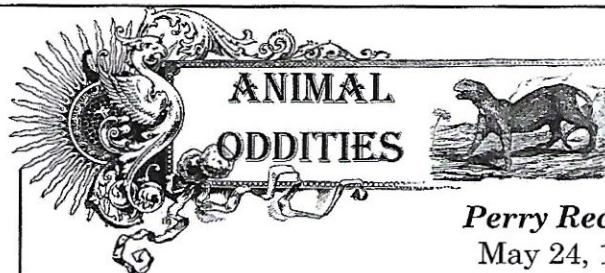
Below are the links to Terry's research on our three soldiers and the general link to his blog of his entire project. It is quite fascinating. As a historian, I appreciate his six years of in-depth research to honor these brave soldiers.

<http://www.geneseecountywwi.com/acquard/>

<http://www.geneseecountywwi.com/clark/>

<http://www.geneseecountywwi.com/noble/>

<http://www.geneseecountywwi.com/>



*Perry Record*  
May 24, 1934

### IMMENSE TURTLE CAUGHT AT LAKE

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By Two Buffalo Men Fishing in Silver  
Lake Inlet

### FISHING IS BEST IN YEARS

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Many Pike and Pickerel Caught -  
Turtle Weighed Nearly 100 Pounds -  
Exhibited at Henry's Dock.

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Here's a fish story which is not a fish story in the ordinary sense, because the catch was a turtle instead of a fish and it is a true story.

Two men from Buffalo who were fishing in Silver Lake inlet one day last week, were astounded to see a huge turtle in the water and succeeded in landing it after strenuous effort. It was taken along with their other catch to Joe Henry's dock at Walker's, where it was exhibited.

Joe, who has conducted a boat livery at that location during many years past and has seen many big ones such as pike, pickerel, muscallonge and other inhabitants of the water in the lake and its tributaries, looked over that turtle with eyes staring in unbelief. "There ain't no such thing," remarked Joe, nevertheless there was the turtle, weighing nearly 100 pounds and measuring three feet the length of its back.

"Believe it or not," Joe assures us of the exact truth of the story and can bring witnesses to prove it.

Incidentally, Joe says that the fishing at the lake this season, is the best that it has been in several years and that good catches are the rule, of pike, pickerel, muscallonge and several smaller varieties.

The news that fishing is good has attracted numerous sportsmen from neighboring localities and they are generally rewarded for their effort.