

The Story of Demmer Richmond, Letcher County “doughboy” during World War I

EDITOR'S NOTE: In honor of Veteran's Day, we bring you this piece by our dear friends, Richard Brown and David Chaltas who researched the story of Demmer Richmond, a Letcher Countian who served during World War I. Our thanks to them for sharing their work.

*By Richard G. Brown
in collaboration
with David Chaltas*

The early years of the 20th century found most of the civilized countries involved in World War I, known as the “The War to end all Wars”. The United States managed to avoid sending her young men off to battle in the first few years of the war. With the war going badly for France and England, the United States finally became involved when President Woodrow Wilson declared war on April 17, 1917. The United States military force was ill equipped and undermanned at the time of the Declaration of War. The number of soldiers in the United States Army was at an all-time low, with most soldiers depended upon to protect the country being in their respective state militias, now called the National Guard. Though Kentucky was not a densely populated state, the militia had no trouble filling its ranks with young men from the mountains and bluegrass areas. Private Demmer Richmond from the mountains of eastern Kentucky was one of many young American boys that would sail for Europe as a “doughboy,” willing to fight for the preservation of freedom.

Demmer was born in March of 1897, near the head of Little Colley Creek in Letcher County, Kentucky. He was the son of Owen Richmond and Susan Collins Richmond. Demmer had grown up in the mountains listening to war stories told by both of his grandfathers who had fought in the Civil War. His grandfather on his father's side of the family, Jonathan Richmond, had served in the 64th Virginia Mounted Infantry of the Confederate Army while his other grandfather, Henry Collins, served in the 14th Kentucky Cavalry of the Union Army. Young Demmer no doubt heard differing viewpoints on the War Between the States from the two old soldiers that had at one time been enemies. Hoping to encounter adventures of his own, Demmer enlisted in the Kentucky Militia at Fort Thomas, Kentucky, on July 6, 1916. At that time, the young volunteer did not know that he would receive more than he had bargained for.

The young mountain boy easily adapted to military life, finding that the discipline and respect demanded there was no different than was expected in the hills of Kentucky. Also, like most country boys, he had grown up with a rifle in his hands, having done

his part to keep food on the table. For almost two years Demmer and his fellow soldiers trained and enjoyed traveling the country during the uneasy peace. In the spring of 1918 his company of Kentuckians was transferred to the 166th Infantry of the 42nd Division of the newly formed American Expeditionary Force. The 42nd was known as the “Rainbow Division” and had been formed from militia units from twenty-six states. This nickname is generally credited to Douglas MacArthur's statement that the division, “Would stretch over the whole country like a rainbow.” Major General C.T. Menoher commanded this newly formed division.

As a boy, he had floated up and down the Kentucky River near his home, pretending he was at sea. No longer would Demmer have to pretend as he and his fellow Letcher Countians soon found themselves sailing in a transport ship across the huge and rough Atlantic Ocean. Arriving in France, they were immediately sent to help in the defense of Champagne Marne. The Germans knew that the Americans were coming and had begun a huge offensive, hoping to win a decisive victory before their arrival. However, the Germans miscalculated the length of time that it would take for the Americans to take their positions. They anticipated that the Americans would be slow moving, much like the French but the Doughboys moved quickly into the Western Front battle line. On July 15, 1918, the last German offensive of the war began with a withering artillery barrage.

Demmer and his fellow Doughboys fought ferociously and stopped the German attack in three days of hard fighting. It was now time for the American Expeditionary Force to begin fighting on the offensive.

On July 18, the Aisne Marne offensive attack began. Several American Divisions spearheaded the attack but due to their losses in the last battle, the 42nd was held in reserve until July 25. That morning, Demmer and the 42nd crossed the Marne River and engaged the German defenders in desperate fighting. The color guard for the 42nd was Hank Gowdy, the hero of the 1914 World Series who had volunteered to fight in the 166th. Gowdy had a batting average of .545 in the series as a player for the Boston Braves. Carrying Old Glory at the front of the advancing battle line, Gowdy and the 42nd took the town of Sergy. Counter attacking with mustard gas, the Germans retook Sergy. Donning their gas mask, the 42nd again charged, retaking the town. Fighting toe to toe for almost two weeks, the German army finally withdrew on August 6, leaving the town in ruins. The Aisne Marne offensive was considered an Allied victory but had cost the 42nd more than 5,500 men.

Demmer and his fellow Letcher County comrades had now been exposed to one of the brutalities of war, the use of chemical weapons.

The Doughboys spent the next two weeks digging their trenches deeper and fortifying their position, waiting for another attack from the Germans. Unknown to the Allied commanders, the German forces were too weak to mount an offense. They spent the same time fortifying the area around St. Mihiel. The overall American commander, General John Pershing, had studied the trench warfare that the Allies and the Germans had fought up to this time. He was a firm believer in an

offensive attack and decided to use a new concept of warfare that he and his staff had been devising. Breaking from tradition that all attacking forces would be commanded from one command center, he would allow his front-line commanders to be independent and use their own initiative to confront problems arising in the attack. He also was impressed with his new armor commander, Colonel George S. Patton, a hard charging, and independent officer. He advised his other field commanders to emulate Patton's style.

Having prepared his officers for the St. Mihiel offensive, Pershing decided on a time and date for the attack. Unfortunately,

his European counterparts did not comprehend the importance of secrecy and allowed this information to become public. Ironically, one Swiss newspaper published the date and time of the attack. Upon learning of the leak, General Pershing asked his front-line commanders their opinion of continuing with the attack. Colonel Patton and the other field officers all reported that their doughboys were eager to get out of the mud and water-soaked trenches. Hearing this, Pershing ordered the attack to continue as planned.

On the morning of September 12, 1918, Demmer and his fellow Americans

Continued to Page 8



DEMMER RICHMOND
Private First Class
Company D,
166th Infantry
42nd Division
WORLD WAR I



Letcher Countians during World War I
(Demmer Richmond is in the center)

Newspaper Notice Concerning Public Scoping Meeting – November 17, 2022



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, FEDERAL BUREAU OF PRISONS

Notice of Public Scoping Meeting to Initiate the Environmental Impact Statement Process for the Proposed Federal Correctional Institution and Federal Prison Camp in Letcher County, Kentucky

Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as implemented by Council on Environmental Quality and Federal Bureau of Prisons (Bureau) regulations, the Bureau is initiating preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the proposed development of a new Federal Correctional Institution (FCI) and Federal Prison Camp (FPC) in Letcher County, Kentucky. A growing challenge to successfully performing the Bureau's mission to protect society is the increasing number of federal correctional facilities and supporting infrastructure that were constructed over 50 years ago (the approximate design life of such facilities), resulting in a continuous need to maintain existing facilities, and when necessary, develop new facilities and infrastructure. To address this need, the Bureau proposes to develop a new medium-security FCI and an adjoining minimum-security FPC in Letcher County, Kentucky. The FCI and FPC would be designed to house approximately 1,152 adult males and 256 adult males, respectively, and serve the need of the Bureau's Mid-Atlantic Region.

Scoping is a part of the NEPA process through which the Bureau describes a proposed action and possible alternatives. The Bureau then seeks input from other agencies, organizations, and the public on potentially affected resources, environmental issues to be considered, and the Bureau's planned approach to analysis. A scoping meeting is not intended to be a Question & Answer session, but rather is designed to solicit public and stakeholder input on the range of issues that the Bureau should consider addressing in the DEIS. This scoping meeting aims to: Provide an overview of the Bureau and project purpose, Present the proposed action, Define resources to be analyzed, Present the proposed approach to analysis, and Provide key milestones and public involvement opportunities during DEIS process.

Representatives of the Bureau will hold an in-person Public Scoping Meeting at 6:00 P.M. ET, November 17, 2022, at the Letcher County Central High School (cafeteria) located at 435 Cougar Drive in Whitesburg, Kentucky, 41858. The Bureau reserves the right to impose a time limit for those speaking during the meeting in order to accommodate all persons interested in commenting. The meeting will be recorded and the recording posted to the project website: <https://www.proposed-fci-letchercountyky.com>. Due to health concerns and for the convenience of the public, interested stakeholders will also be able to participate during the Public Scoping Meeting by way of a virtual meeting service that allows the public to participate safely and conveniently from remote locations using a computer, tablet or smartphone by calling-in using the toll-free telephone number (877-829-8910, Conference Code: 857288) or via the link below:

<https://wspusa.zoom.us/j/89605575889?pwd=RkZzUGhIMDdrYyt3M1lyVFJncFZxQT09>

Zoom Meeting ID: 986 0557 5889 and Passcode 705186

Submit comments concerning the scope of the DEIS for the proposed project via the Comment tab on the project website: <https://www.proposed-fci-letchercountyky.com/>. Written statements and comments will also be accepted via U.S. mail or email through November 30, 2022. Submit comments to: Kimberly S. Hudson, Site Selection Specialist, Construction & Environmental Review Branch, Federal Bureau of Prisons, 320 First Street, NW, Room 901-5 West, Washington, DC 20534, Email: kshudson@bop.gov. Please note that before including your name, address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, the entire comment, including personal identifying information, may become publicly available. For additional information and to receive future notifications, please contact: Kimberly S. Hudson. Thank you for your interest.