

MISSOURI STATE SOCIETY DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Proudly Honors



CLARENCE RUSHIN GODWIN
UNITED STATES ARMY
PRIVATE FIRST (E-1)
SEPTEMBER 21, 1917 – FEBRUARY 3, 1918



WOUNDED IN ACTION IN 1917

as

PURPLE HEART PATRIOT

JULY 2025

Janet Barry Wendleton, Honoring Her Grandfather's Service and Sacrifice
Sponsored by: Warrensburg Chapter, NSDAR



*James Roy (Aka Clarence Rushin)
and Grace Wilson, 1982 50th Wedding
Anniversary*

My grandfather, Clarence Rushin Godwin, was born in Tallassee, Alabama, in 1895 and moved with his parents, Rushin and Amanda Godwin, to Jonesboro, Georgia, as a young boy. His mother cleaned houses, and his father was a lumberjack. His father died of a heat stroke while resting under a tree. His mother stepped off a city bus in Atlanta, Georgia, one morning on her way to work, had a massive heart attack, and fell over dead on the sidewalk. My grandfather, Clarence, was six years old and an orphan. His life was never simple again. He lived with an older brother in Atlanta. He started school and went to school through the fourth grade, then he quit and went out looking for and found a job. It was not that he was not smart in school. He was very intelligent. There was no one to encourage him to go to school. He thought working was more important; they needed money. He found jobs and eventually went to live with

the Roy Wilson family. They employed him and gave him a stable home to live in. He felt they were very kind to him.

In 1917, he was working at a mill in Columbus, Georgia, and decided he would join the army to fight in WWI. He volunteered and was sworn in on September 21, 1917, at the age of 22. He went to Fort Gordon, Georgia, and on October 26, 1917, he was in France. He went to a base in England when granted leave. The U.S. forces were helping the British fight the Germans in France and Germany. He drove munitions trucks and worked on machinery. He sent a postcard to his sister-in-law in Atlanta that simply said, "The ship on which I sailed has arrived safely overseas," to let them know he was okay. He signed it Clarence R. Godwin.

He was involved in the third Battle of Ypres and the beginning of the Battle of Cambrai. These battles were hard-fought and slow-moving for Allied troops. The weather turned bad

during the battle at Ypres. In Flanders, the third Battle of Ypres began on July 31, 1917. The British and French armies advanced two miles. But then the rains began and did not stop. The ground damaged by German artillery bombardments and rain quickly turned into a quagmire. The rains caused carts and trucks, horses and soldiers to get mired in the mud. Men and horses completely disappeared in water-filled craters. The whole operation bogged down in the sticky clay of Flanders. The U.S. forces moved in to assist the British in this battle in the fall.

The Germans attacked fiercely, and the soldiers were gassed with mustard gas. Huge bombs exploded. Soldiers were sick from wound infections, flu, starvation, gas exposure, etc. While the British had made great forward movement, when the weather turned foul, they lost most of the ground they had taken. The battle for the Passchendaele Ridge took eight weeks for the Allies to win. The cost to both sides was between 200,000 and 400,000 soldiers. The average daily deaths were 7,050 allied soldiers per day. The U.S. lost two percent of its army, but the British lost 20% of their soldiers and the French lost 24% of their men.

The horrors of this war discouraged the men. Clarence was gassed and had permanent damage to one lung. He had shrapnel scars on his legs and arms. He rested at a base in England for a time. He went back to his unit in France and was sent to fight at the beginning of the Battle of Cambria. His unit broke through German lines and marched or drove into Germany at some point.

The Battle of Cambria was a British attack assisted by the American Expeditionary Force and was initially successful in gaining a large amount of ground. They used new artillery techniques and amassed tanks. But 10 days into the battle, the Germans brought the British and American forces to a halt. The Germans eventually gained ground back. This battle became a blueprint for a future successful battle in 1918.

Clarence was honorably discharged on February 3, 1918, on the demobilization of his unit. The army stated he had no disability at the time of discharge. Later, in the 1940s, he requested and applied for disability benefits for his injured lung. He received a monthly check for \$23.00 for the rest of his life. He did register for the draft of WWII in 1942 at the age of 47, but he was never called up.

Clarence went back to work for Roy Wilson at a Mill in Georgia when he arrived home. He did not talk about his war experiences to anyone. He wanted to forget the horrors of war and move on with his life. When he left Atlanta at the age of 35, he moved to St. Louis, Missouri, and became a cook at a restaurant outside Anheuser-Busch. He took the name James Roy Wilson, and except for military records, Clarence Rushin Godwin was no more.

My grandmother was working at the same restaurant as a waitress. They met and fell in love, and married. She married Roy Wilson, at least that is what she thought. He was 37 and she was 20. They ran that restaurant together for six or seven years.

He and my grandmother had three children by then, and he was gambling, drinking, and smoking too much. Dorothy died when she was three years old from an asthma attack and an enlarged heart. She is buried in a cemetery in St. Louis. Jaunita, or Billy, went to live with my grandmother's sister, Agnes, and her husband, Ewell. They had no children, and my grandmother thought leaving Billy with her was a good idea.



1917-1918 On leave in France.

My grandmother then convinced my grandfather to sell the restaurant and move to "Paradise" or the Blair Creek Valley on the Current River. Shannon County, Missouri, was a dry county at the time. They were city kids who soon learned they had to make their own paradise.

My grandparents went on to have nine children. They lost the youngest at two years of age due to an accident. My grandfather literally built two houses on his farm, developed a gray water system siphoning off wastewater downstream so that their springwater and creek water would always be clean. He cut timber in a lumber mill for a time. He planted an acre-sized garden, raised dairy cattle, chickens, goats, and had a horse. He opened a general store on his farm and sold goods to neighbors in the valley. He carried the mail by horseback to those in Gang, Missouri, or Blair Creek Valley. He sold produce and chickens at Souard Market in St. Louis on weekends. He served as an ambulance driver to neighbors for trips to St. Louis hospitals and as a hearse driver picking up the body and bringing it back to Blair Creek when someone died. He became Police Chief of Eminence, Missouri, at age 65 and served 13 years in this position. He did quit drinking, gambling, and smoking.



1917 Clarence Godwin, second from right, second row, in military uniform.



1917 Clarence Godwin, on left, with friend in Mexico.

When he started receiving disability checks from the army in the 1940s as Clarence R. Godwin, my grandmother wanted to know what was going on. She married Roy Wilson. Who was Rush Godwin? Who was the man she was married to? He had to confess he was Rush Godwin, and he had changed his name to James Roy Wilson, which was the name of his boss, who had taken him in as a boy and always been kind to him, treating him like family. She was okay with it after she knew the real story.

Clarence R. Godwin's story is told to show that he was a man with a fourth-grade education, orphaned at the age of six, and went on to have a full, productive life after the war. Had he had the opportunity for a full education with a chance at college, he would have been someone special. As it was, he had nine children and 11 grandchildren. He now has great-grandchildren, but the grandchildren did not get married and start having children right away. He served his family and his community for years. His greatest joy was his family. He died at the age of 90 in 1985, eight months after my grandmother died.