

Orland Doughboy Buried in Flanders Field American Cemetery

By Patrick Lernout & Christopher Sims

Sergeant Alfred John Foster
MG Co, 363rd Infantry Regiment
91st Division
Killed In Action October 31, 1918
Plot D — Row 01 — Grave 22
Army Serial Number 2262829



Image of Sgt. Foster from "Soldiers of the Great War," Hausee, Howe & Doyle, Soldiers Record Publishing Association, Washington D.C., 1920.

—Collection of Patrick Lernout and Christopher Sims

Alfred John Foster was born on September 1, 1894 on his father's farm in Orland, Glenn County, California. His parents, Joseph Foster and Marion Marks (Marques), were born on the Azores Islands (Portugal). Alfred was the fifth of 15 children (9 brothers and 5 sisters). He still lived in Orland at the time he was drafted. Alfred was the 5th on the draft list of Glenn County, but since the four men before him were exempted, he became the first one who really had to serve. He travelled by train from Willows, California to Camp (now Fort) Lewis, Washington, where the 91st (Wild West) Division was trained and formed. It wasn't long before he was promoted to corporal due to his "calm and quiet efficiency," his cheerfulness, and for always being ready to help his comrades.

In July 1918 he arrived with the division in Cherbourg, France. The division was in reserve during the St. Mihiel offensive and fought gallantly in the Meuse-Argonne offensive. The attack was halted because both divisions on their flanks could not advance as quickly as the 91st Division, resulting in their flanks becoming totally exposed to the Germans. On October 1st he was promoted to sergeant, again because of his efficiency and steadfastness in combat.

During those last days of the war the Belgians had difficulties in repulsing the German attacks. King Albert of Belgium asked his allies for help. Two American divisions were chosen to help the Belgians—both because of their remarkable and outstanding achievements in the Meuse-Argonne: the 91st and the 37th.

At Waregem, when they "went over the top" at dawn of October 31st (1st day of their battle in Belgium), they encountered heavy enemy machinegun fire. This was near the race course. Alfred was hit almost immediately and died only seconds later. They buried him in a place described as: "a beautiful



Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Foster during their 2003 visit to Sgt. Alfred Foster's grave in Flanders Field American Cemetery, Waregem, Belgium.

—Courtesy Flanders Field American Cemetery

a very moving moment. Seventy years after the visit of his mother, Alfred was once again reunited with his family.

In Flanders Field, the poppies blow between the crosses row on row...among those...Alfred's cross.

The Authors

Patrick Lernout is Flemish and graduated as a textile engineer but became a Human Resources Manager. In his youth he was impressed by a visit to the beautiful Normandy American Cemetery at Omaha Beach. World War I, however, became of more historical importance to him. Years later when he came to live in Waregem, Belgium, it was obvious that he would become interested in the only WW I American cemetery in Belgium.

Christopher Sims is English and in 1974, he followed in his father's footsteps as an associate at the Flanders Field American Cemetery. One of many keen WW I amateur historians living in Belgium, in 1989 he became the founder and first area Chairman of the Belgian branch Western Front Association. During his career he has been commended several times for his services by military as well as civilian authorities. These include the American Legion Meritorious Service Medal (1990) and the Gold Merit Medal (1994).

Lernout and Sims "are driven, they say, by a mix of gratitude, curiosity and compassion for the forgotten boys."

spot overlooking the Lys River."

In 1933 his mother visited the Flanders Field Cemetery with the Gold Star Mother Pilgrimage. She was 68 years old at the time. She said that she was not frightened about crossing the ocean, but that she was more afraid of the trip from California to New York, since she hardly spoke any English.

Alfred was part of Lt. James Boyd Jr.'s Machine Gun Company of the 363rd Infantry Regiment. Lt. Boyd later became a judge in Glenn County. Upon his return, on July 4th 1919, he founded the "Alfred J. Foster American Legion Post #34."

The farm, where Alfred and his parents cultivated the land, is now an orange plantation.

In September 2003, Alfred's nephew, Dan Alfred Foster from Half Moon Bay, California, son of Albert's brother Benjamin, came to visit the grave of his ancestor. It was