



## Great War recruits get send-off

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MARIA E. BROWER

There was another era in our history when flags waved and patriotic fervor ran high. On the home front were drives to sell Liberty Bonds and collect metal and peach and apricot pits (used in the manufacture of war materials). There was also the rationing of fuel, sugar and other food and manufactured products. Citizens young and old sacrificed to aid the war effort.

On Oct. 6, 1917, all businesses in Grass Valley were asked to close as a sign of appreciation for a group of "selected" men from two counties - Sierra and Nevada. The Union on that date reported that it was expected that the entire city would turn out to assemble at the Narrow Gauge Railroad depot in Grass Valley to meet the train coming from Nevada City.

There had been dinners and special receptions in the weeks leading up to the big send-off in honor of the young men, who had been selected by the draft board to fight in Europe.

In Nevada City, hundreds of citizens turned out to join the procession of schoolchildren, the Nevada City Home Guards, members of the County Council of Defense, Exemption Board, Mexican and Spanish War veterans, the Grass Valley band, representatives of the Grass Valley Rifle Club, Grand Army of the Republic veterans and a large crowd of patriotic citizens to bid farewell to the men - some of whom would not return.

A few short months after basic training, the soldiers were shipped overseas, where they joined thousands of other men from Canada, Britain and the United States in combat during World War I.

The 38 men leaving from Nevada County and six from Sierra County were destined for Camp Lewis in Washington for training. Five months earlier, on May 18, 1917, the U.S. Congress passed the first Selective Service Act, which required states to set up local draft boards for every 30,000 people. Two more registration acts were passed in 1918, and the total number of men required to register was more than 24 million.

The total amounted to almost one-fourth of the U.S. population. Less than 10 percent of those who had to register actually served, while others who were not required to register signed up and served.

Among those who left Nevada County that day was Orlando Giunchi of Nevada City, a 29-year-old native of Tereglio, Italy, who had come to the United States in 1904. He was the son of Sedele Giunchi of You Bet; his mother, two brothers and a sister still lived in Italy.

Giunchi and his uncle, Anacieto Agostini, operated the Sacramento Street Hotel in Nevada City. Just five months prior to leaving Nevada County for training (the same month the Selective Service Act was passed), Giunchi filed a Declaration of Intention to become a citizen of the United States. He would never be able to complete the three-step naturalization process.

On Oct. 31, 1918, Orlando Giunchi was killed in battle, only 12 days before the end of the war. He had been promoted to corporal, and it was reported that he had been killed on French soil when the "big deciding battles were on and he was engaged in the thickest of the fighting."

Cpl. Giunchi was part of the 91st Division, made up of draftees from California (the majority), Washington, Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Oregon, Nevada, Utah and Alaska. The official nickname of the division was the "Wild West Division" because of the locations of the states. Another non-official nickname was "The Pacific Coast men."

The division had a battle cry of "Powder River - Let'r buck," from a river in Montana and the rodeo term meaning "let it go." The total casualties of the division from their arrival in Europe until the armistice were 1,343 killed and 4,466 wounded.

A month after Armistice Day, a fir tree was chosen as the official insignia of the division and is the insignia for the division.

Giunchi was more likely killed in Belgium, not France as was first reported in The Union, due to confusion or conflicting information reported to the family after his death. A cross in Flanders Field at the U.S. Military Cemetery in Waregem, Belgium, marks the grave where Orlando Giunchi rests. The cross, made of white marble, is inscribed with the following:

ORLINDO GIUNCHI

CORPL 363 INFT 91 DIV

CALIFORNIA OCT 31 1918

There is no marker locally for Giunchi, nor is his name on a tile on the Veterans Memorial Wall in Grass Valley's Memorial Park. For a veteran's name to appear on the wall, a donation is required to pay for the tile.

It is unknown how many other Nevada County veterans' names are absent from the wall. Efforts are being made by the Nevada County Historical Society's genealogical director to research the names of other WWI vets without a tile.

The Nevada County Historical Society meets the last Thursday of each month at 7:30 p.m. in the community meeting room of the Madelyn Helling Library in Nevada City. There will be no general meeting in July, due to a field trip to Downieville today. The tour includes a visit to Shady Flat, China Flat and the Kentucky Mine. Participants should meet at Rood Administrative Center in Nevada City by 9 a.m.

Maria E. Brower is a local researcher and member of both the Nevada County Genealogical Society and the Nevada County Historical Society. She works at the Doris Foley History Branch Library.

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