



# Freedom's Voice

The Monthly Newsletter of the  
Military History Center

112 N. Main ST  
Broken Arrow, OK 74012  
<http://www.okmhc.org/>



## "Promoting Patriotism through the Preservation of Military History"

Volume 5, Number 2

February 2017

### Civil War Living History Display

Saturday, March 11 – 10:00-3:00 – on the MHC Flag Plaza: re-enactors, Civil War cannons and more.

### March 16 – Vietnam Veterans Day

The MHC will host its annual Vietnam Veterans Day observance on Thursday, March 16.

The program will be presented in the activities auditorium of Broken Arrow's First Methodist Church, 112 E. College ST, beginning at 7:00 p.m. Admission to the program and museum is free, on March 16.

Please come out for this patriotic day. Visit the MHC, and pay tribute to our Vietnam veterans.



World War I soldier Frank R. Neidert – May 30, 1978  
(Story on pages four and five)



Wounded World War I soldiers at the New York City Friars Club in April 1919. Frank Neidert is at the middle left with his head circled in black. Funds for the dinner were provided by Friars Club Abbot, George M. Cohan, shown standing at the middle far right. The framed photograph is displayed in the World War I Exhibit at the MHC. It was donated to the MHC by Mrs. Nancy Muirhead, Frank Neidert's daughter.

### Museum Hours and Admission Fee

Tuesday – Friday: 10:00 – 4:00; Saturday: 10:00 – 2:00  
Closed Sunday and Monday and major Federal holidays

Adults – \$5.00

Members and Children under 18 – Free

For more information, call (918) 794-2712

[www.okmhc.org](http://www.okmhc.org)



On August 30, 1942, United States Marine Corps Major John Lucian Smith commanded Marine Corps Fighter Squadron 223 (VMF-223). On that day, Major Smith shot down four Japanese Mitsubishi A6M "Zero" fighter planes. That brought his total enemy aircraft kills to nine, in as many days. He would shoot down a total of nineteen Japanese warplanes during his fifty-four-day tour on Guadalcanal. At the time, that was the most any American pilot had shot down. After Guadalcanal, he would go on to participate in combat over the Bismarck Archipelago and the Philippines, but would bag no more enemy aircraft.

President Roosevelt presented Major Smith with the Medal of Honor at the White House on February 24, 1943. His Citation reads in part: "... for conspicuous gallantry and heroic achievement in aerial combat above and beyond the call of duty as commanding officer of Marine Fighter Squadron 223 during operations against enemy Japanese forces in the Solomon Islands area, August-September 1942."

John Lucian Smith was born at Lexington (Cleveland County), Oklahoma on December 26, 1914. He graduated from the University of Oklahoma in 1936. While at the University, he was a member of the ROTC. Immediately after graduation, he was commissioned a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant of the Army, but resigned a month later to enter the Marine Corps. He began flight training in 1938 and graduated a year later with the designation of Naval Aviator.

Smith went on to a career in the Marine Corps, reaching his retirement rank of Colonel on January 1, 1951. His Marine Corps career after World War II was all in administrative positions. In addition to the Medal of Honor, Smith was awarded the Legion of Merit, Distinguished Flying Cross, Bronze Star with V device, four Air Medals and other awards. He retired from the Marine Corps on September 1, 1960.

Col. Smith died at Encino, California on June 10, 1972. He is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.



## Cactus Air Force

Cactus was the code name for Guadalcanal from August 1942 until December 1942. Cactus Air Force was the name given to the collection of Marine Corps air units assembled on Guadalcanal, particularly those operating from Henderson Field. (Other aircraft operated from aircraft carriers, and long range bombers operated from the New Hebrides Islands south-east of Guadalcanal.) After December, the official name of the unit became Commander, Aircraft, Solomons (AirSols), but Cactus Air Force was still used frequently to refer to the organization.

VMF-223 of Marine Aircraft Group 23, commanded by Major John L. Smith, flew the first fighter aircraft – eighteen F4F Wildcats – from the escort carrier, USS *Long Island* to the newly completed Henderson Field on August 20, 1942. Lt. Colonel Richard Mangrum, VMSB-232, followed immediately afterwards with twelve SBD Dauntless dive bombers. They began conducting combat missions the next day.



An F4F Grumman Wildcat parked on Henderson Field – August 1942

In 1942, the Japanese Zero fighter was generally recognized as the best fighter aircraft in existence. The F4F Wildcat could not match the Zero in speed and maneuverability, but was more heavily armored. The Zero had the advantage in one-on-one aerial combat. To overcome their disadvantage, Major Smith developed tactics that directed the F4F pilots to concentrate on bombers and their escorts. For instance, F4F pilots would climb to an altitude 5,000 feet above the bombers with the sun behind them and attack the formations from the rear. Since the bombers were more dangerous than fighters to the men and facilities on Guadalcanal, this proved to be a winning tactic.

During the period of the Cactus Air Force, Marine Corps pilots downed over 300 Japanese aircraft and probably damaged as many more. During the same period, Cactus Air Force dive bombers and torpedo planes sank seventeen major Japanese ships, including the battleship, *Hiei*.

Ninety-four Cactus Air Force pilots were killed or went missing in action and another 177 were evacuated because of wounds or illness. Six Cactus Air Force pilots were awarded Medals of Honor for their actions during the Battle of Guadalcanal (August 1942-February 1943).

The Cactus Air Force was critical to the success of the Guadalcanal Campaign, and Major John Lucian Smith was critical to the success of the Marine fighter pilots of Cactus Air Force.

## This Month's Featured Artifact



Japanese 8 mm Nambu Type 14 Pistol with Holster

This pistol was surrendered to Captain Al Thiel, U.S. Army, in 1945 at the Japanese Air Base at Inchon, Korea. The base commander met Captain Thiel at the front gate and surrendered the air base. The name of the officer is painted on the holster. We believe his name is Ginji Oohashi, which means "Big Bridge". The officer's unit and his address in Japan are on the inside of the holster.

The Nambu Type 14 pistol was developed by General Kijiro Nambu. First produced in 1902, the Type 14 evolved, and mass production began in 1925. It was first issued to non-commissioned officers, but was available for purchase by officers.

After the war, Captain Thiel became a pharmacist and worked for the Fred Meyer Pharmacy in Seattle, Washington until his retirement. Captain Thiel gave the Nambu to Quentin E. Gilman, his friend and fellow pharmacist. Mr. Gilman donated the pistol to the MHC.

*Note: All firearms in the MHC collection have been rendered inoperable.*

### Support the Military History Center

We believe the MHC provides a valuable service to the local community, especially to veterans and students. We ask for your financial support to help the MHC continue our mission of "Promoting Patriotism through the Preservation of Military History" and honoring the sacrifices our veterans have made, and are making, to keep America free.

For more information, please contact the Military History Center at (918) 794-2712 to learn how you can be a financial supporter, or click on the link below to go to the MHC website at [www.okmhc.org/donate/](http://www.okmhc.org/donate/).

Monetary donations, as well as gifts in kind, are tax deductible, subject to IRS regulations.

## Oklahoma Ace



Robert Samuel Johnson was America's second leading air ace of World War II, sharing that distinction with COL Charles Henry MacDonald, USAAF and second only to COL Francis Stanley Gabreski, USAAF and MAJ Gregory Boyington, USMC.

Johnson was born in Lawton, Oklahoma on February 21, 1920. He learned to fly at age thirteen and had his pilot's license by age sixteen. He enlisted in the Army as an aviation cadet in the summer of 1941. After completing flight training, he was ordered to report to the 56<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group in Connecticut. The 56<sup>th</sup> FG was later ordered to Great Britain, where Johnson underwent training in P-47C Thunderbolts, in Scotland. After that training, the 56<sup>th</sup> FG was ordered to its permanent base at RAF Horsham St. Faith in England.

LT Johnson entered the war on January 18, 1943, experienced his first combat on April 29 and shot down his first German fighter on June 13. By the time he completed his combat tour, Johnson had flown eighty-nine combat missions, mostly as bomber escort, and shot down twenty-seven German aircraft. During the same period, he was promoted to captain and then to major, on May 1, 1944. After completing an extended tour of duty, which he had requested, the Air Force sent Johnson home, on June 6, 1944, as America's leading European air ace. During the course of his combat tour, Johnson was awarded a Distinguished Service Cross, Silver Star, Distinguished Flying Cross, three Bronze Stars and a Purple Heart.

With Johnson out of the war, LTC Stanley "Gabby" Gabreski, also of the 56<sup>th</sup> FG, overtook him to become the top European Theater air ace. He was shot down over Bassenheim, Germany, on July 20, 1944, just fourteen days after Johnson had been sent home. Back in the United States, Johnson was invited to the White House to meet the President and became part of a War Bond tour.

After the war, Johnson worked for Republic Aviation, the manufacturer of the P-47, as chief test pilot and as an engineering executive for eighteen years. After retiring from Republic, he went into the insurance business in Lake Wylie, South Carolina. He remained in the Air Force Reserve after the war, retiring as a Lt. Colonel. Johnson collaborated with aviation author, Martin Caidin, to write his autobiographical story of the 56<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group, *Thunderbolt!*, in 1958.

While visiting relatives in Tulsa, Johnson collapsed and was taken to St. Francis Hospital, where he died on December 27, 1998. His body was returned to South Carolina, where he was buried next to his wife, who had died in 1995.

## Back from the Dead

This is not the story of a World War I soldier who performed an exceptional battlefield deed that qualified him for a high-ranking decoration. Rather, it's the story of an ordinary young man from a village in upstate New York, who volunteered to serve his country and became caught up in the fog of war or the fog of War Department bureaucracy. In most respects, his story is not unlike the stories of millions of other ordinary young men who have gone to war, performed their duty to the best of their abilities and returned home to pick up their lives.

Frank Robert Neidert, Jr. was born in the village of Brockport (Monroe County), New York on March 6, 1901. His father, Frank, Sr., was manager of a meat market. His mother, Ida, was a homemaker. He had at least one sibling of whom we know, a younger brother. Young Frank dropped out of school and went to work as a shoemaker. It wasn't unusual at the time for boys and girls, who weren't headed for college, to drop out of school and go to work or help at home. On December 13, 1917, Frank joined the New York State Guard. In March 1918, he went to Rochester and enlisted in the U.S. Army.

ENLISTMENT RECORD.

Name: Frank R. Neidert Grade: Private First Class  
 Enlisted March 5, 1918, at Rochester, New York  
 Serving in First enlistment period at date of discharge.  
 Prior service: \* None

Noncommissioned officer: No  
 Marksmanship, former qualification or rating: No  
 Horsemanship: No  
 Battles, engagements, skirmishes, expeditions: Argonne Forest  
Liberation

Knowledge of any vocation: Shoemaker Dec 1918  
 Wounds received in service: Machine gun bullet wound on skull and hip.  
 Physical condition when discharged: Fair  
 Typhoid prophylaxis completed: Unknown  
 Paratyphoid prophylaxis completed: Unknown  
 Married or single: Single  
 Character: Excellent

Remarks: Be came honest and faithful servant. He absconded with the money he received to travel pay (cause of disability). Hemiplegia, left side to M.T.B. wound on right parietal region, and fracture of skull. Did not exist prior to enlistment. One line of duty. Disability: Three fourths

Signature of soldier: Frank R. Neidert

Entered to travel pay  
 in New York City  
 to Rochester, N.Y.

W. H. [Signature]  
 Commanding Det. [Signature]

Frank R. Neidert

\*This document will be held in office of Department, with duplicate sent to office of each enlistment.  
 This document will be held in office of Department, with duplicate sent to office of each enlistment.

Frank Neidert's Enlistment Record

Frank was sent to Camp Columbus at Columbus, Ohio. He seems to have been formally inducted into the Army at Camp Columbus, on March 7, one day after his seventeenth birthday. He fudged his age a bit, as he is shown on military records as being nineteen years-old at the date of his enlistment. He was assigned to Co. I, 49<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment. Columbus seems to have been a muster camp, as within a few days, his regiment was sent to Camp Merritt, New Jersey for basic training. Like many other young men who have volunteered for military service, this was Frank's first time away from home. He was soon homesick and unsure. He regularly wrote home, mostly to his

mother, about every two or three days. Once at Camp Merritt, he started having doubts about his decision to enlist and began asking his mother to "get me out". He apparently believed it would be easy because he had lied about his age, and being underage, had enlisted without parental approval. He changed his mind several times about wanting out, and in the end, decided to stay. His letters always contained inquiries about his family back home and assurances that he was okay. They frequently included pleas for money and personal items, such as toiletries. A private's pay was \$8.15 per month, so he went through his money in short order. Second to money, his greatest interest was food. He continually asked his mother for delicacies such as cakes, cookies, fruit, and such like, food not regularly served by the Army. Otherwise, he expressed satisfaction with Army food, even chipped beef on toast! Towards the end of June, his regiment was ordered to Camp Upton on Long Island for rifle training. Word was that the regiment would be there about a month.



Frank Neidert and a friend – 1918

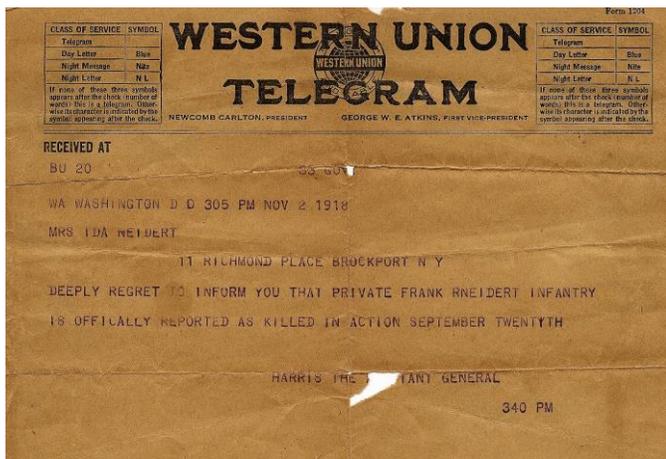
Meanwhile, in France, the Army needed men. Rifle training at Camp Upton was cut short. The men would finish their training in France. The regiment shipped out for France on July 16. Frank reported in a letter home that the twelve-day trip was uneventful, and he didn't get seasick. The troop ship docked at Calais on July 28. Frank was almost immediately enamored of France. The 49<sup>th</sup> was billeted somewhere near Le Mans, but Frank couldn't divulge the exact location. There, training continued.

In a letter dated August 27, he told his mother that he had been promoted to "first class private". On September 12, he was transferred to Co. C, 109<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division (Pennsylvania National Guard). The 49<sup>th</sup> Infantry was a short-lived regiment that never saw combat. Apparently, it was a training regiment, and after training was completed, its men were stripped out as replacements for frontline regiments. General Pershing was preparing for the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, which began on September 26.

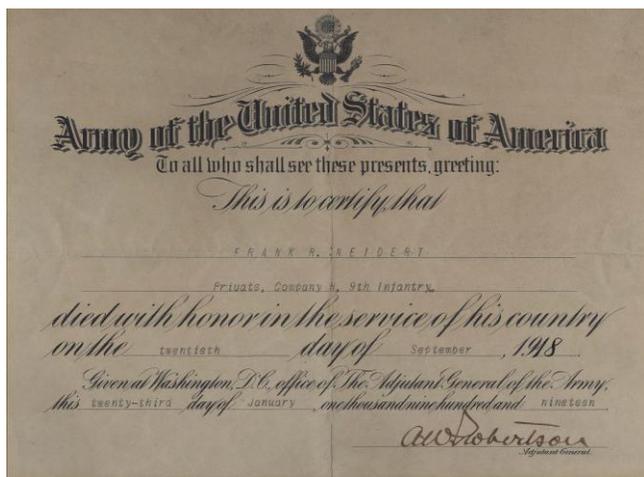
On the second day of the Offensive, PFC Neidert was lying on the ground somewhere in the Argonne Forest with his face toward the enemy. A German machine gun bullet penetrated his steel helmet and tore out a small piece of his skull to the extent that brain matter oozed out. From here, his story becomes muddled. Frank was obviously taken to a field hospital,

where the doctors did a remarkable job saving his life, considering the nature of the wound and the state of medicine in 1918. By the time the casualty reports reached the Adjutant General's office, Frank's records showed him killed in action on September 20. That was before his unit actually went into combat! It seems that the records of two different soldiers, perhaps with similar names, had gotten mixed-up.

On November 2, the Adjutant General's office sent Mrs. Neidert a telegram advising her that Frank had been killed in action on September 20. The local newspaper duly reported it. A few days after receiving the death notice, Mrs. Neidert received a letter from Frank, dated October 22. Frank reported that he had been wounded on September 27 and was "getting along fine". This immediately aroused suspicion about the accuracy of the telegram. Was Frank still alive, and if he was alive, where was he, and what was his condition? His mother began making inquiries with the Red Cross, which was immensely helpful throughout the ordeal. They eventually located Frank at the American Ambulance Hospital of Paris and reported to his mother that he was doing well. A Red Cross volunteer regularly visited him at the hospital.

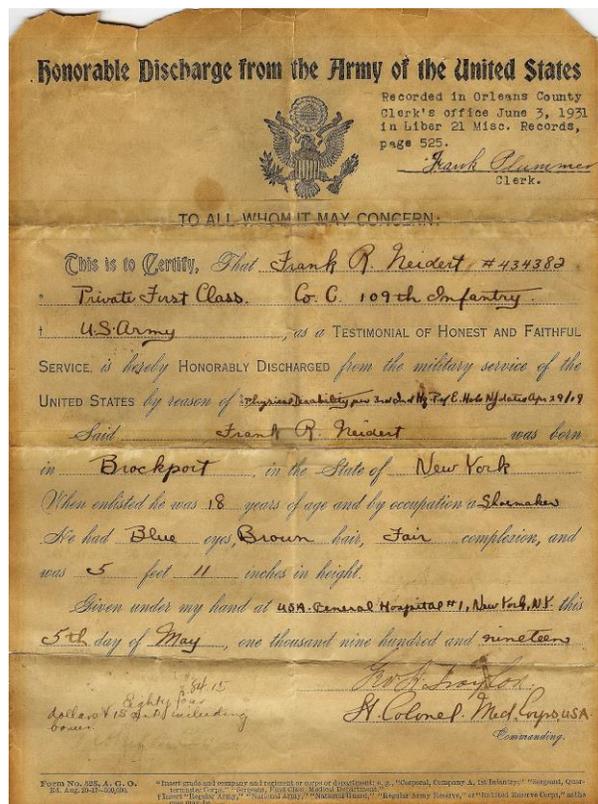


War Department telegram to Frank Neidert's mother advising her of Frank's death. Not only was he not dead, but the date of his "death" was wrong, as well. The certification of his "death", issued on January 23, 1919, and shown below, not only shows the wrong date, but the wrong unit (Co. H, 9th Infantry). It's highly probable that there had been a mix-up of Frank's records with those of another soldier.



The War Department bureaucracy finally realized, or was convinced, they had made an error, and that PFC Neidert was very much alive. On December 30, 1918, the Adjutant General's office sent Mrs. Neidert a telegram confirming that her son was alive and had been "returned to duty". Even so, that didn't stop the military bureaucrats from issuing an erroneous document certifying his death. "Returned to duty" seems to have been pro forma, as Frank was still hospitalized, not on duty. He was later transferred to General Hospital No. 1 in New York City for the remainder of his recuperation.

PFC Frank R. Neidert was given an Honorable Discharge on May 5, 1919, after fourteen months of service. We know little of Frank's life after his discharge. In one of his letters to his mother, he had expressed regret for having dropped out of school. He said after the war, he would go back to school. We might imagine that he wouldn't have returned to high school. If he did go back to school, it was likely to a vocational school. He married Ethel Martha Ross on July 2, 1924. The couple had two daughters. Frank died on December 16, 1989, at age eighty-eight. He is buried in Hillsdale Cemetery in Clarendon, New York. Except for his military service, Frank lived his entire life in the same area of upstate New York.



PFC Neidert's Honorable Discharge from the Army of the United States

Frank's mother kept all of his letters and the letters and notices from the War Department and Red Cross. Frank's daughter, Mrs. Nancy Muirhead of Skiatook, Oklahoma, and his grandson, CWO Al Potter (Nancy's nephew) of Boydton, Virginia, donated the entire collection to the MHC. We are exceptionally grateful for this extraordinary gift and for the opportunity to share part of the life of a young American hero.

## United States Enters World War I

While, many, if not most, Americans expected that sooner or later the U.S. would likely be dragged into the European war, neither they nor the government were prepared for it. No one wanted war, and Congress, reflecting the attitudes of most Americans, refused to appropriate funds to prepare for war.

When Congress declared war on April 6, 1917, the United States Army had about 200,000 members of which about a third were National Guardsmen. Only a handful of the Army's units were combat ready. By the time Frank Neidert enlisted in March 1918, the Army had grown to 1,639,000. By the Armistice seven months later, another 2,000,000 had been added to the rosters, and that number alone was serving with the American Expeditionary Force in France.

In the beginning, the Army was short of everything necessary to conduct war on the scale that was occurring in Europe. It was not only short of men, equipment and weapons, it lacked the infrastructure necessary to raise, equip and train an army the size of those currently fielded by Germany, Great Britain or France. The Army lacked the officers and NCOs necessary to fill-out the existing regiments, brigades and divisions, not to mention the new ones it would need to create.

Frank Neidert's situation was undoubtedly distressing to his family, and they may never have understood how or why it happened. However, it should be no surprise, that with the Army's rapid expansion of men with little or no experience operating in an environment as large and hectic as the War Department and the army it supported, mistakes would be made. With greater understanding of the complexities involved with the large and rapid mobilization of a country unprepared for a war on the scale of World War I, we can now have a greater appreciation of how such things could have happened. It would have been something short of a miracle if what happened to Frank Neidert was a singular event, especially when compounded by ordinary government bureaucracy.



28<sup>th</sup> Infantry "Keystone" Division  
Pennsylvania National Guard

The 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division is the oldest division-sized unit in the armed forces of the United States. Some of the units of the division can trace their lineage to Benjamin Franklin's battalion of Pennsylvania militia, organized during the French and Indian War. The 28<sup>th</sup> saw extensive combat in both world wars.

The 109<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment was organized in 1877 at Scranton, Pennsylvania and still exists as a unit of the Pennsylvania National Guard. It's first combat was in World War I, where it participated in six battles or campaigns.

## Oldest Living World War II Veteran



Richard Overton, age 110, was born in Bastrop County, Texas in 1906. He served in the Pacific Theater during World War II from 1942 to 1945 as a member of the all-black 1887<sup>th</sup> Engineer Aviation Battalion. He now lives in Austin, Texas. His 111<sup>th</sup> birthday will be in May.



Artist Len Krentzler's painting of fighter pilot William Bruce "Bill" Overstreet, Jr. in his P-51 Mustang, "Berlin Express", flying between the arches of the Eiffel Tower in pursuit of a German ME-109 in the spring of 1944. Soon after this bit of derring-do (by both pilots), Overstreet finished the German. The French government presented Overstreet with its highest award, the Legion of Honor, in 2009. Bill Overstreet, a native of Virginia, died at age ninety-two on December 31, 2013, in Roanoke, Virginia.



## Spanish-American War

On February 15, 1898, the battleship, USS *Maine*, exploded in the harbor of Havana, Cuba. At that time, Cuba was a colony of Spain, and many in the United States blamed Spain for the explosion. The Spanish government denied it. It didn't matter. Spain was a cruel colonial master and the Cubans had been in revolt since 1895. Many Americans were sympathetic to their cause. With the sinking of *Maine* and the loss of 260 American lives, war fever was at a high pitch. Those looking for an excuse to drive Spain from Cuba led the charge for revenge and war. Congress declared war on April 19, 1898.

The United States Navy's Asiatic Squadron, commanded by Admiral George Dewey, struck the first blow less than two weeks later by destroying a Spanish fleet in Manila Bay in the Philippines, another Spanish colony. What people remember most about the war, is Teddy Roosevelt and his Rough Riders and the Battle of San Juan Hill near Santiago, Cuba.

The war lasted just 115 days, with the major land fighting in Cuba and some minor fighting in Puerto Rico. A cease-fire was signed on August 12, and a peace treaty was signed in Paris on December 10, 1898. Many years later, naval investigators determined the probable cause of the *Maine* explosion to have been spontaneous combustion of coal dust in the bunkers. Spain had nothing to do with the sinking.

Spain granted Cuba independence by the terms of the Treaty of Paris ending the war, but until 1902, the United States maintained a small occupation force on the island. Cuba declared itself independent on May 20, 1902. The United States acquired a permanent lease over the old Spanish naval base at Guantanamo Bay and maintained strong political and commercial influence with Cuba until the Castro revolution. The United States became a colonial power by acquisition of the Spanish colonies of Philippines, Puerto Rico, Guam and Wake Island.

The United States granted the Philippines independence in 1946. Puerto Rico, Guam and Wake Island remain U.S. possessions. The two former possessions are now self-governing United States commonwealths.



Wreckage of USS *Maine* in Havana Harbor

## Oklahomans in the Spanish-American War

The Spanish-American War was the first foreign war that involved men from Oklahoma, or what would become Oklahoma.

Congress authorized the Army to recruit volunteers. Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Theodore Roosevelt, was determined to get into the war. He resigned his office, was commissioned a Lt. Colonel in the Army and set about leading the recruitment drive for a cavalry unit that he would command. He wanted tough men from the West and Southwest for his regiment, which would be mustered into service as the 1<sup>st</sup> United States Volunteer Cavalry, better known as the Rough Riders.

At the time, Oklahoma was two territories: Indian Territory in the eastern half of the future state and Oklahoma Territory in the western part. The estimated population of the two territories in 1898 was 700,000. From that population, the Army recruited three troops of cavalry for Roosevelt's Rough Riders, and five companies of infantry, a total of 849 officers and men.

The volunteers of Oklahoma/Indian territory served in Cuba. Oklahoma Territory lost two men killed in the fighting: Captain Allyn K. Capron of Fort Sill and Roy W. Cashion of Hennessey. An additional thirteen were wounded. Indian Territory men killed in battle were Tilden W. Dawson of Vinita, Silas R. Enyart of Sapulpa, Milo A. Hendricks of Muskogee and William T. Santo of Choteau. Yancy Kyle of McAlester died of yellow fever. Fourteen Indian Territory men were wounded.



Allyn K. Capron in the early 1890s as a Lieutenant of the 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry

*"I think he was the ideal of what an American regular army officer should be. He was the fifth in descent from father to son who had served in the army of the United States, and in body and mind alike he was fitted to play his part to perfection. Tall and lithe ... a first-class rider and shot ... . He looked what he was, the archetype of the fighting man. [His] mastery of his art was so thorough and his performance of his own duty so rigid that he won at once not merely their admiration, but that soldierly affection ...".* Lt. Colonel Theodore Roosevelt

In 1925, Captain Capron, 1<sup>st</sup> United States Volunteer Cavalry, was posthumously awarded a Silver Star for his heroic actions while leading his troops in the Battle of Los Guasimas.

# *“Lest We Forget”*



**Lorraine American Military Cemetery – Memorial Day 2010**

Lorraine American Military Cemetery and Memorial is located just outside Saint-Avold, Département de la Moselle, France. The 113.5 acres contains 10,489 graves, the largest number of any American World War II cemetery in Europe. Those interred there died mostly in the autumn of 1944 during the drive to the Siegfried Line, mainly from Third and Seventh armies. Among the interred is SSGT Ruben Rivers of Tecumseh (Pottawatomie County), Oklahoma, whose story of extraordinary heroism was told in last month’s edition of the newsletter.



*Freedom is not free.*



**THANK YOU**