

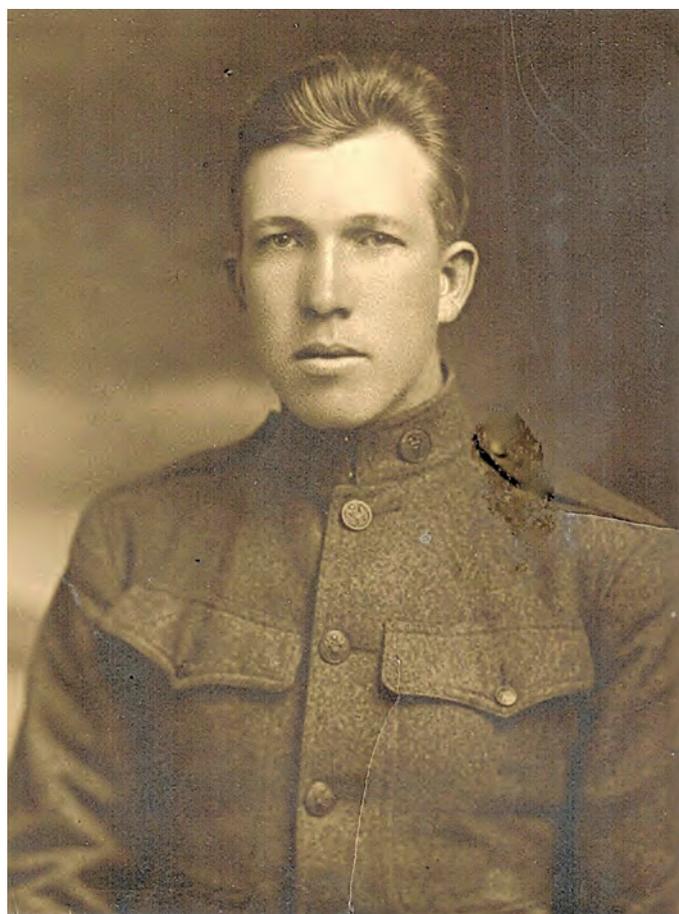


An Unsung Hero of the Great War

Colleen Callahan Gilbert remembers her late father-in-law through his personal papers

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AS WE ENTER YET ANOTHER YEAR WITH THE PANDEMIC, I AM reminded of my late husband's father, Lester Lawrence Wells, who dealt as a young man with the uncertainties of infectious diseases and death. I had never met Lester as he passed away years before I met my husband. His family spoke of him kindly as a serious, good-hearted man who rarely discussed his time as a medic in World War I. Years after his death some of his papers resurfaced, including old enlistment records,



Lester Lawrence, WWI soldier.

letters written to his parents while serving in the military and copies of old army newspapers like the *Trench and Camp*. This information was a gold mine in learning more about the Great War and one young man in our family who gave up his youth to answer the call.

Lester was born on 27 August 1897 in Paulding, Ohio. He was the fourth child of a family of ten. His father, Albert Harper, was a small dirt farmer trying to make ends meet without much success. When Lester was in his early teens, the family moved to the small farming community of Dryden, Michigan, in hopes to better their lives. All the children were required to work the farm with the exception of school days. Lester excelled in his studies and was also accomplished in sports. In high school he played the role of Abraham Lincoln in the annual school play. Due to his size and acting abilities, his classmates and later acquaintances nicknamed him "Abe." After graduating from high school, in 1915, he later attended college and worked as a laborer to pay for his education and help out the family. He enjoyed attending school and had ambitions to become a minister, but those dreams soon came to an end.

America Enters the War

On 6 April 1917, President Woodrow Wilson declared that the United States would join its allies – Great Britain, France, and Russia – to fight in World War I. After remaining neutral for three years, Wilson had no choice but to enter the war after Germany sank U.S. merchant ships, killing many Americans. After Congress approved Wilson's request for entering the war, the volunteer turnout was much smaller than the president expected. Knowing that he could not put together an army with so few individuals, Congress passed the