

KEARNEY Christopher James Story

As a boy he was known as Christy; later, his friends would call him Christ-- which rhymed with list, not with heist. He had beautiful pale blue eyes (like his daughter Marie's), reddish hair and a ruddy complexion. He grew to 5 foot 9 and a half, according to his Army discharge papers.

He spoke with a slight brogue, or perhaps the dialect of the Pennsylvania hills: He pronounced the word "early" as "airly," and said "hoy!" rather than "hey!" to get someone's attention.

As a boy, Christy often had to help his father at the coke works. His schooling stopped altogether at the eighth grade. But while Christopher did not have much formal education, he had a high regard for learning. (He always referred to schoolchildren as "scholars.") He made a point of knowing how to count and say hello in all the languages commonly spoken by the local miners--Polish, Italian, French and Hungarian. He could tell you the names of all the presidents in chronological order, he could recite all the counties of Pennsylvania in alphabetical order, and was very good at mental arithmetic.

He had two favorite poems, both by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, that he could recite by heart: "The Village Blacksmith" and "The Wreck of the Hesperus." "The Village Blacksmith," a portrait of a simple, hard-working man with a great love of family, seems to capture Christopher's self-image:

His brow is wet with honest sweat,
He earns whate'er he can.
And looks the whole world in the face,
For he owes not any man.

Christopher Kearney was a veteran of World War I, having enlisted in the National Guard on April 22, 1917, about two weeks after the U.S. declared war on Germany. This seems to have been the central experience in Chris' life, reports his daughter Kathleen: He didn't talk much, but he liked to talk about the war. The September 11, 1917 edition of the Mount Pleasant Journal recorded the departure of Chris' unit:

Company E, 10th Pennsylvania Infantry of National Guardsmen, and the local members of this district called to serve in the National Army, have left for their southern training camps, the former at Camp Hancock, Augusta, Georgia...but the loyal people of Mount Pleasant did not allow them to depart until fitting tributes were paid both alike as becomes those who go forth to fight in defense of the Nation's honor.... Thousands of loyal people...looked with proud eyes on Captain Zundell and his 151 sturdy, sunburnt boys as they swung along with that step that told of faithful training both here and on the Mexican border.... There were both cheers and tears as the sturdy young soldiers swept down the long street and entrained at the station after a few farewell remarks were made them from the steps of the O.P. Shupe Mill.

Chris' unit became the 110th Regiment, 28th Infantry Division, which gave its name to the 28th Infantry Division Highway in Pennsylvania. The unit was soon sent to France, a country that impressed Chris deeply: "I think he thought a country that served wine with meals was quite a country," his daughter Kathleen reports. He said he acquired a taste for marmalade from British soldiers that he met there, and once "infuriated Mother at the dinner table when he mixed some scrambled eggs together with his meat, recalling that he had done this in Europe," his son Patrick notes.

Very few of Chris' memories concerned the war itself. (He did recall once hearing the German gun known as Big Bertha firing at Paris.) He was attached to the Supply Company of the 110th--

KEARNEY Christopher James Story

he liked to say that he was "the man behind the man behind the gun"--and so saw little if any actual combat, which is a blessing considering the horrible conditions of World War I trench warfare. Working as a quartermaster probably also taught him skills he would later use running his own business.

Chris' company did take part in some significant actions: They helped block the last major German offensive at the Second Battle of the Marne in July 1918, and participated in the Meuse-Argonne offensive in September and October, the biggest operation of the war for U.S. forces. They were praised as the "Iron Brigade" by Gen. John Pershing.

Christopher remained in France until May 11, 1919, being sent home just days after the Treaty of Versailles was completed. He received an honorable discharge as a private 1st class from Fort Dix, New Jersey, on May 23, in good physical condition and of "excellent" character, according to the U.S. Army. He was given \$136.37 in discharge pay, including a \$60 bonus.

Patrick Kearney tells the story of his father's homecoming: "When Chris returned to the United States after completing his service in France, he arrived at the family home in Calumet late at night. Rather than awaken the family, he simply went up to bed, and was about to get in bed with his brother when the family awoke."