

**Private 1st Class William Kenner Neal©**  
**Regimental Number: 181483**  
**30th US Engineers Regiment, Company B**

**born: 25 March 1895 – died: 21 March 1918**

William was born 25 March 1895 at Shreveport, Louisiana, USA.<sup>1</sup> He had at least one brother, Quincy Allen, born 11 January 1885,<sup>2</sup> and at least one sister, L. C. Norris, whom he named as his next of kin.<sup>3</sup>

William was drafted to the U.S. Army. His draft registration card indicated that he was living in Colorado City, Texas, on 28 May 1917. He was a waiter employed by Capt. E. S. Wheeler at Leon Springs Training Camp. He was single, 22 years of age, 5'9" tall, slender with grey eyes and dark brown hair.<sup>4</sup> William was inducted at Fort Bliss, Texas, on 9 November 1917. He served with Company B of the 30th Engineers, and by 1 December 1917 he had been promoted to Private 1st Class.<sup>5</sup>

Unfortunately, in 1973 about 80% of the US World War I Army files were destroyed in a devastating fire. No duplicates were available and none of the documents had been microfilmed.<sup>6</sup> Thus, there is little information available about William's war service.

However, William served with the 30th Engineers, known as the "Hell Fire Battalion." The Regiment was activated on 14 August 1917 as an offensive gas regiment, a response to the German use of poisonous gas. After selecting officers due to their special training in fields such as chemistry or engineering, the Army then appealed directly to the public, and the press was anxious to help. For instance, the *Boston Transcript* for 26 October 1917 wrote: "Only keen, red-blooded men who are desirous of seeing active service are wanted for this regiment." The article described the special pay and benefits to successful candidates, including immediate promotion, as happened with William, and "to be among the pioneers in the latest development of modern warfare." Appealing to American patriotism, readers were sold on "the real chance for men to perform active service on the battle front." They would go to France earlier than other soldiers, be in the vanguard of the attacking forces, supported by the superior American military, and they would be able "to teach the Germans the war game in the use of their own hellish weapons."<sup>7</sup>

The First Battalion of the 30th US Engineers Regiment, including William in Company B, departed for the war on 25 December 1917 with a march through Washington in a snowstorm. The following day they embarked on the US Transport *President Grant*, arriving in Brest, France, on 10 January 1918. However, before going to the Front, the men began five weeks of offensive gas warfare training under the supervision of British commanders. By early March the entire regiment was at the Front in France, a speed record among combatant troops.<sup>8</sup>

Between 19 March and 4 April 1918, the special companies of Company B carried out a series of gas attacks. On 21 March, Company B, including M Special Company of which William was a part, participated in the attacks. In the course of those attacks William was injured by an exploding shell and was seriously injured and gassed.<sup>9</sup> He was taken to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station and died the next day, just days before his 23rd birthday. He was buried on 23 March at Houchin British Cemetery at Row G, Grave 30.<sup>10</sup>

However, William was exhumed on 9 December 1919.<sup>11</sup> Americans have a long history of bringing their boys home, and this war, even fought across the ocean, was no exception. At first, the government refused to bring the dead soldiers home, but the War Department soon discovered that families of the deceased soldiers expected the return of their sons and husbands, and demanded to know when they would be returned home so proper funerals could be held. Finally, in October 1919 the War Department announced that it would survey each of the deceased soldiers' families who would have the choice of either bringing the remains home or having them reburied in newly created American military cemeteries in Europe. In all, the remains of 46,000 soldiers were returned to the US while another 30,000 were laid to rest in eight US military cemeteries in France and Belgium.<sup>12</sup>

No information was found relating to where William was moved. William's brother and sister were informed of his death,<sup>13</sup> and presumably decided where to have him laid to his final rest.

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<sup>1</sup> "U.S., World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917–1918," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.ca](http://www.ancestry.ca): accessed 31 March 2017), entry for William Kenner Neal, Registration State: Texas

<sup>2</sup> "U.S., World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917–1918," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.ca](http://www.ancestry.ca): accessed 31 March 2017), entry for Quincy Allan Neal, Registration state: Texas

<sup>3</sup> "Texas, World War I Records, 1917–1920," *FamilySearch* ([www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org): accessed 31 March 2017), entry for William K Neal

<sup>4</sup> See endnote 1.

<sup>5</sup> See endnote 3.

<sup>6</sup> "US WW1 Military Service Records," *The Great War 1914-1918* (<http://www.greatwar.co.uk/research/military-records/ww1-service-records.htm#usservicerecords>: accessed 7 April 2017)

<sup>7</sup> "The Story of the First Gas Regiment," by Addison, James Thayer, *Internet Archive* (<https://archive.org/details/storyoffirstgasr01addi>: accessed 31 March 2017)

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, up to page 22

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, page 211

<sup>10</sup> "No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station," *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* ([www.bifhsgo.ca](http://www.bifhsgo.ca): accessed 31 March 2017), entry for Neal, W.K.

<sup>11</sup> *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* ([www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org): accessed 7 April 2017), entry for Dickinson, Harold. Harold was buried next to William's original grave, but as he was exhumed, he is not specifically in the CWGC database.

<sup>12</sup> "American Battle Monuments Commission," *The Great War 1814–1918* (<http://www.greatwar.co.uk/organizations/american-battle-monuments-commission.htm>: accessed 31 March 2017)

<sup>13</sup> See endnote 3.