

Corporal Ray C. Whalen, Sackets Harbor, New York



In this 100th year of his sacrifice, we honor Sackets Harbor's Corporal Ray C. Whalen. Corporal Whalen was the son of Charles and Leta Clarke Whalen and brother of six. The last of Corporal Whalen's siblings, lifelong residents of Sackets Harbor, passed away only within the last decade. He is uncle and great-uncle to several current village residents.

During his early years, Ray, called "Pat" by his friends, attended Sackets High School, played basketball on one of the area's first school teams and was a baseball player. After high school he found work at Brownville Board and was employed there when the US Congress declared war on the German Empire on April 6, 1917. On April 7, 1917, Ray enlisted.



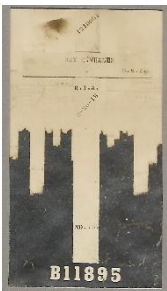
He joined Watertown's Company C of the National Guard 1st Infantry. At mobilization, that unit became part of the 107th US Infantry. As with other local boys, Private Whalen spent nearly a year in training camps in Madison Barracks, lower New York State, and the southern American states. On May 9, 1918, he left Newport News, Virginia aboard the US Army transport *Susquehanna*, bound for the battlefields of France.

Many of Whalen's letters home survive and well-depict his transition from small town boy, passionate about his mission and excited to be traveling to parts unknown, to a young man, homesick and missing his family, to trainee gaining expertise, and finally to confident soldier.

Corporal Whalen suffered injury in France in late August-early September 1918 when his company, after spending a night in the trenches, was sent out to carry ammunition to the front line. During their return they underwent German shelling and Corporal Whalen was temporarily buried beneath a brick wall that collapsed over him. In a letter to his sister Lora, he described being saved by a comrade who grabbed his exposed hand and pulled him from the rubble.



Several of Corporal Whalen's later letters from the trenches also remain, the last of these written on the backs and in the margins of family photos he carried with him.



On September 29, 1918, during the breaking of the Hindenburg Line, Corporal Whalen inadvertently got ahead of his unit during their advance. During his attempt to return to the group he was struck and killed by a German bullet. He was buried within days, along with many of his comrades, in a battlefield grave in Bony, France, near what is now the [Sommes American Cemetery](#). His family received official notice of his death two months later, on Thanksgiving Day, 1918.

When repatriation of the fallen took place in 1921, Corporal Whalen's body was returned to Sackets Harbor. April 1921 newspaper accounts of the funeral and burial describe

“military honors of a nature rarely accorded” taking place. They relate that the funeral was attended by Madison Barracks Commander Alexander and his entire staff of officers, and included a 30-piece regimental band, an infantry platoon, and members of the former Company C.



Additional to military honors, all stores and businesses in Sackets Harbor were closed during the funeral, school was dismissed, and all school children attended the funeral mass which was celebrated by priests from Sackets Harbor and Brownville. The funeral procession from church to Sackets Harbor’s Lakeside cemetery was led by the regimental band playing the funeral dirge, the infantry platoon, a group of 20 Boy Scouts, and 200 school children, family, friends, and representatives of local groups. The entire procession was about a mile in length. The band played “Nearer My God to Thee” as Corporal Whalen’s casket was lowered, a rifle salute was made, and “Taps” played.

Corporal Whalen’s parents and siblings mourned their son and brother for the rest of their days—the younger even unto the first decade of this 21st century. His many nieces and nephews grew up hearing his name often, always spoken with that sad mixture of pride and sorrow inherent in Gold Star families.

Today, 100 years later, Corporal Ray C. Whalen’s name is still spoken, his sacrifice still honored.

Loretta Whalen Stamps
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