



GREENVILLE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes

Committee of the Whole

January 9, 2018

5:08 p.m.

County Square – Conference Room D

Council Members

Mr. Butch Kirven, Chairman
Mr. Willis Meadows, Vice Chairman
Mrs. Xanthene Norris, Chairman Pro Tem
Mr. Joe Dill
Mr. Mike Barnes
Mr. Sid Cates
Mr. Rick Roberts
Mr. Bob Taylor
Mrs. Liz Seman
Mr. Ennis Fant, Sr.
Mr. Lynn Ballard
Mr. Fred Payne

Pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act, notice of the meeting date, time, place and agenda was posted on the bulletin board at the County Square and made available to the newspapers, radio stations, television stations and concerned Citizens.

COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT

Fred Payne, District 28

STAFF PRESENT

Joe Kernell, County Administrator
John Hansley, Deputy County Administrator
Regina McCaskill, Clerk to Council
Shannon Herman, Assistant County Administrator
Bob Mihalic, Governmental Relations Officer
Paula Gucker, Assistant County Administrator, Public Works

OTHERS PRESENT

None

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Butch Kirven

INVOCATION

Councilor Rick Roberts

Item (3) APPROVAL OF MINUTES

ACTION: Councilor Ballard moved to approve the minutes of the December 5, 2017, Regular Committee of the Whole meeting.

Motion carried unanimously.

Item (4) CAMP SEVIER CENTENNIAL – OLD HICKORY PROJECT

Presented by: Don Koonce

On September 29, 1918, the U.S. Army 30th Infantry Division broke the Hindenburg Line; an important segment of the German defensive network on the Western Front during World War I, which led to the end of the war. The 30th Infantry Division trained at Camp Sevier located in Greenville County.

President Woodrow Wilson declared war in 1917 and the country was in a mad rush to recruit soldiers as well as create camps, which were called cantonments. There were 32 cantonments established throughout the country. Alister Furman and William Serrine decided that the business community needed a camp in Greenville County so they optioned 1000 acres between Greenville and Taylors. William Serrine invited General Leonard Wood, Chief of Staff, to Greenville to look at the area as a possible camp. Mr. Serrine had served with General Wood during the Spanish – American War. General Wood looked at the land and made an announcement in Cleveland Park that the U.S. Army would build a cantonment called Camp Sevier on the land and it became one of the largest in the country.

Camp Sevier was 1900 acres and extended from where the old Shriner’s Hospital was on Rutherford Road to Paris Mountain State Park and then almost to Taylors. There was also 200 acres near Cleveland Mills that was an artillery range. Camp Wing was located in Travelers Rest on the Swamp Rabbit Railroad. It was a trading camp for soldiers to learn how to repair railroads - both engines and tracks.

On July 10, 1917, training started for soldiers from Tennessee, North Carolina and South Carolina. The 118th Regiment was comprised of South Carolinians, and Company A of the Regiment was the Butler Guards who were commanded by Sergeant Hayward Mahon, who later became Mayor of Greenville. The Brigade Commander was Major William Workman who was the grandfather of Bill Workman, who also served as Mayor of Greenville. The soldiers trained from July 1917 until April of 1918 at which time they left for France. During that time, Greenville saw the coldest winter in its history with temperatures averaging 8 degrees for a period of almost three months. There were massive amounts of snow which virtually shut-down all training. The Army was very behind in providing proper gear for the soldiers; many did not have weapons or uniforms. The machine guns and artillery did not arrive until three months prior to the soldiers leaving for France.

Twenty-five ships took the 30th Division and its support groups to France. John “Blackjack” Pershing was the Commander of the American Forces. He assumed that all Americans would serve as Americans under American control. General Haig, Commander of the British Forces, disagreed and soon realized the Americans were undertrained. They had not been trained to fight in the trenches, in gas defense, etc. General Haig convinced President Wilson to put the Americans under the British Army for proper training; therefore, they were considered American Units under the British Army. General Haig created three training phases; however, the Germans started a major push in Belgium and the training ended. The 30th Division was sent to Flanders Field in Ypres, Belgium. There they were put in the trenches and the Germans attacked using mustard gas. The American soldiers were not used to using gas masks and hundreds of them suffered; however, they pressed on and took over many units, took prisoners and captured ammunition. The King of England officially named them “A Fighting Unit”, the first American unit to receive that name.

The Unit was then transferred to the Canal Division near Bellicourt, France. Both General Haig and General Pershing decided that was where they needed to punch through the Hindenburg Line as they felt the German morale was weakened. It was the toughest place on the Hindenburg Line to penetrate but the timing was right. The Australian 8th Division was supposed to spearhead the effort but could not as they had lost over 4000 men at Ardennes. So instead, General Haig threw the 30th Division as the spearhead. As they advanced, the Mark V tanks which were supposed to take out the barbed wire, got bogged down in artillery holes. Several of the officers with the 30th Division were killed but the soldiers kept going, even though they were undertrained. They eventually broke through the line at Bellicourt and kept on going. By October 19, they had pushed forward 10 miles and literally cut the German army in half. They finally stopped and were replaced by the Australians.

In February of 1919, the 30th Division returned to South Carolina, and Camp Sevier was closed in April of 1919. The Army had considered making it a permanent base but some of the landowners who had leased land through William Sistine and the Chamber of Commerce sued the Army. The Army backed off and made Camp Jackson (Fort Jackson) a permanent base instead. There was, however, a major reunion in September of 1919 with almost 20,000 veterans showing up with their families.

Mr. Koonce stated none of the towns and cities that had camps were ever inclined to celebrate. He added that the poppy was symbol of WWI; all over Europe the poppy symbolized those who gave their all for the Allied Forces.

Councilor Taylor asked if there were any buildings left from Camp Sevier.

Mr. Koonce stated there were 15 officers' houses and a main building, called the Station Bar, still standing where Paris, S.C. was originally located. He added the laundry building for the hospital still stood. While Camp Sevier was shut down in April of 1919, the hospital remained open due to all the mustard gas cases until 1925.

Mr. Koonce passed out pins for the Council Members and stated the centennial campaign would last all year. A number of events have been planned throughout the year including Veterans Day and the Greenville Scottish Games as the 30th Division served with the Royal Highland Regiments. He stated a major event would be scheduled for September 29th and details would be available at a later date. Six different versions of posters depicting the celebration will be passed out to establishments all over the County by the American Legion and members of the D.A.R. There are also plans for a video.

Chairman Kirven inquired about Law Enforcement's participation.

Mr. Koonce stated officers with local police departments will wear the poppy pins all year and decals will be placed on their vehicles. He stated he had not spoken to the Sheriff but had plans to do so. Ken Miller with the Greenville City Police agreed to allow Mr. Koonce to brief the officers about the celebration and the significance of the poppy pins. He stated there were at least 8-9 major presentations already scheduled with various organizations to talk about the Centennial Celebration of Camp Sevier.

Chairman Kirven asked if the school system would be involved in the celebration.

Mr. Koonce stated he had been talking to the school system for quite some time and they were trying to get the story into their curriculum. If not, he would more than likely make a presentation. He added that national media had shown an interest in the story.

Councilor Seman inquired if the Upcountry History Museum would be involved.

Mr. Koonce stated the Dana Thorpe with the museum was redoing the Military Exhibit to commemorate WWI and the 30th Division. Presentations were also planned for the museum.

Councilor Ballard asked if any remnants of the camp remained.

Mr. Koonce stated the 15 officers' houses near Sevier Middle School still stood, as well as the laundry building and the Station Bar at Paris Mountain. The ammunition bunker was on Warehouse Road and there were some foundations still around. The camp was literally taken apart as the majority of the structures were tents and crude lumber buildings. This was the main reason the Army decided not to make Camp Sevier an Army base.

Chairman Kirven stated he had read something in the paper about Rutherford Road being paved during that time.

Mr. Koonce stated the National Highway, otherwise known as Rutherford Road, was paved by the Army from Greenville to Camp Sevier and was the first paved road in Greenville County.

Councilor Dill commended Mr. Koonce and his colleagues and stated he had wondered for a long time when Camp Sevier would be honored. He added Camp Sevier was a deep part of Greenville County's history and some of his relatives fought with the 30th Division.

Mr. Koonce stated the war was very short. He stated about eight months ago, he received a telephone call from an official with the Belgium government requesting information on Camp Sevier. The official told him there were monuments honoring the 30th Division all over France and Belgium and requested Mr. Koonce make a major presentation to the Belgium Delegation. He then asked what Greenville County would be doing to honor the 30th Division.

Mr. Koonce introduced his team: Teresa Slack – major researcher, Kevin McBride – GHS & Upstate Warrior Solution sponsor, John Boyanoski – public relations. A press conference was scheduled for January 17 at the American Legion Post 214. There was also a Facebook page titled: Camp Sevier – Old Hickory helps end WW1.

Teresa Slack stated she was in the process of collecting information on descendants.

Councilor Dill stated many people in the mountain area of Greenville County have collected spent shell casings from when the soldiers would hold artillery practice in the mountains.

Mr. Koonce stated a young man who fought with the 30th Division wrote a letter to his brother telling him how scared he was fighting in the trenches. But, as he looked out at the total devastation and the cloud of mustard gas before him, he could see little red flowers, poppies, everywhere. The poppy is the official symbol commemorating military personnel who have died in war. The Queen of England has embraced the idea and The Tower of London is surrounded by poppies. As an aside, Mr. Koonce added the Swamp Rabbit Trail was supposed to have been a railroad from Greenville to Knoxville, Tenn., but it was never completed.

Councilor Dill asked about funding for the Camp Sevier Centennial – Old Hickory Project.

Mr. Koonce stated the City of Greenville and Greenville County have both agreed to fund the project.

Joe Kernell stated both have contributed \$12,500 each and the money would pay for buttons, advertisement, posters, etc.

Chairman Kirven thanked Mr. Koonce for taking his time to make the presentation to Council.

Item (5) **ADJOURNMENT**

ACTION: Councilor Dill moved to adjourn.

Motion carried unanimously and the meeting was adjourned at 5:34 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Regina G. McCaskill, Clerk to Council