

Nels T. Wold

Born

24 Dec 1895, Winger, Polk, Minnesota

Entered Service

12 Apr 1918

Minnewaukan, North Dakota

Company I

138th Infantry

35th Division

World War I

Died

26 Sep 1918



Early Years

Nels T. Wold was born 24 Dec 1895 in Winger, Polk County, Minnesotaⁱ, the 8th of 10 children born to Tidemand E. and Klara (Tharaldsrud) Wold who both immigrated to the United States from Norway in 1883. After Klara died when Nels was just six years old, Tidemand had an 11th child with his second wife, Osse Lee. Tidemand died when Nels was 16.

When Nels registered for the draft on 5 Jun 1917, he was living in Akron, Ohio, and working for Goodyear Rubber Company. He was described as tall, with blue eyes and light hair.ⁱⁱ

Nels was living in Minnewaukan, North Dakota when he enlisted in the Army. He was inducted at Crookston, Minnesota on 2 Apr 1918, and sent to Camp Dodge, Iowa. His emergency contact was his stepmother who was living in McIntosh, Minnesota at the time.ⁱⁱⁱ

The War Years

Nels served in Company M, 163rd Depot Brigade from his induction until 21 Apr 1918. He was promoted to Pvt. 1st class, transferred to Company I, 138th Infantry, and sent overseas on 3 May 1918. After a short layover in England, the company was sent on to France on 19 May 1918.^{iv}

Nels wrote to his sister, Inga, from France: "I am laying in the grass under a big shade tree and taking a good rest. It is very pleasant and beautiful around here now.' Soon after, he was positioned at the spear point of the long Meuse-Argonne front; he was one of 400,000 American soldiers flanked across France by millions of British, French, and other Allied troops.^v

The men of Company I spent most of the next two months training, marching, and camping at various locations in the Vosges region of France. On July 17, 1918, they saw their first action in the trenches of France when Company I relieved another unit on the Collette front. Two days later, Company I itself was relieved, and the men began another period of marching, training, and camping. In early September, Company I, along with the rest of the 35th Division, was sent to the

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Saint-Mihiel area, where it was held in reserve during the Allied offensive in that region. Later in that month, after being sent into the Argonne forest region of northeastern France, the company took part in the Battle of the Argonne from September 26 through September 30. Here, near the town of Cheppy, Company I's commanding officer, Captain Alexander R. Skinker, was killed on September 26 while trying to knock out a German machine gun emplacement. For this action, Skinker was posthumously awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.^{vi}

This was the same day that Nels was killed, also trying to knock out a German machine gun nest. Nels had already disabled four enemy machine guns, but his luck ran out attacking the fifth.

When Nels' army comrades realized that the invincible fighter had been downed by German machine guns, two men carried Nels one mile to a safe place to die...One man was from Rutland, North Dakota. Chris Antonson (his July 26, 1920 letter can be read behind the glass display case at the American Legion) wrote out the last words Nels supposedly said as he lay dying, "Pray for me boys, and write my folks and tell them I love them all."^{vii}

Nels was initially buried near Cheppy, France. His remains were later returned to Minnesota and buried in Elim Cemetery in Winger.^{viii}

The Post War Years

On 31 Dec 1919, Nels T. Wold was posthumously awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. The commendation reads:

Nels Wold, Pvt, Co. I, 138th Inf. For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty in action with the enemy near Cheppy, France, September 26th, 1918. He rendered most gallant service in aiding the advance of his company, which had been held up by machine gun nests, advancing, with one other soldier and silencing the guns, bringing with him upon his return, 11 prisoners. Later the same day he jumped from a trench and rescued a comrade who was about to be shot by a German officer, killing the officer during the exploit. His actions were entirely voluntary and it was while attempting to rush a fifth machine gun nest that he was killed. The advance of his company was mainly due to his great courage and devotion to duty.^{ix}

"Wold was one of the 100 named by General Pershing as America's bravest, and who were awarded the congressional medal. Corp. O. G. Birkeland, of McIntosh, who was a chum of Wold, says, "Nels was a typical fighter and feared no danger."^x

On 5 Jun 1919, the new American Legion Post in Crookston was named the Nels T. Wold Post.^{xi} Ione (Vraa) Ostgarden, the daughter of Nels' sister Alma (Wold) Vraa, "was a life member, and held several leadership positions, in the Auxiliary of Nels T. Wold American Legion Post #20."^{xii}

**Compiled by Leslie Hartz Sprott
Anthony Wayne Chapter**

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Photos courtesy of Kathrine (Vargason) and Jerry Kaupang. 5 May 2010

NOTES

ⁱWorld War I Draft Registration card for Nels Wold.

ⁱⁱIbid.

ⁱⁱⁱ*Roster of the Men and Women Who Served in the Army or Naval Service (including the Marine Corps) of the United States or its Allies from the State of North Dakota in the World War, 1917-1918 Volume 4 Rich to Zygmund.*

^{iv}Ibid.

^v*Legendary Locals of Crookston*, p. 24.

^{vi}American Expeditionary Force. 35th Division. 138th Infantry. Company I. Records, 1917-1976

^{vii}Congressional Medal of Honor Society official website.

^{viii}*Legendary Locals of Crookston*, p. 25.

^{ix}Congressional Medal of Honor Society office website.

^x*Polk County Minnesota in The World War*, p. 20.

^{xi}Ibid., p. 146.

^{xii}*Crookston Times*, 1 Feb 2011, obituary for Ione Ostgarden.

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