

Avon Herald

GSTON COUNTY, NEW YORK, THURSDAY, APRIL 21, 1921.

Over-seas Comrades and Entire Community Pays Last Tribute To Memory of Sergt. Cleary

The communities of Avon and Caledonia laid aside all business, and paused for a few minutes Monday morning, to pay its last tribute and devotion in loving memory to Sergt. Matthew T. Cleary, "D" Company, 105th Machine Gun Battalion, killed at the battle of the Laselle River, on October 19, 1918, in the closing days of the war.

The body reached Avon on the ten o'clock train Saturday morning, and was met at the station by the family, and details from Matthew T. Cleary Post of the American Legion, of Caledonia, and Joseph Gallipeau Post of Avon, and escorted to the residence of his parents, Mr. and Mrs. James B. Cleary, of Clinton street, where it lay until Monday morning, when the funeral was held from St. Agnes Church.

The local post of the American Legion had charge of the funeral arrangements, and planned a military funeral. The procession formed in front of the Post rooms, and moved to the residence. At a few minutes before ten, the tolling of the local church bells, and the shrieks of the fire whistle, announced the moving of the column from the house. The formation was as follows: Detail of 24 men, mounted, from Troop M, 1st Cavalry, New York Guard, under command of Captain Perry Euchner; American Legion Posts of Caledonia, Avon, Lima, and surrounding towns; former members of M Troop, Woman's Relief Corps, caisson conveying body, with horses lead by ex-soldiers; members of the family, and citizens in cars. The high school pupils, and higher grades of the school and the Parochial school, followed on the walk.

As the procession moved slowly up the street, to the solemn strains of the funeral dirges played by the Avon Springs Cornet Band, hundreds of people lined the walks, and impressiveness of the scene caused many of them to pause for a minute and reflect.

Emotional thoughts were many those few minutes. The thoughts were not only of "Matty" Cleary, but of "Everyboy," for Everyboy played an important part in the great drama of life just so recently ended and a lot of fathers and mothers and sisters saw their own boys march away, engaged in the same mission as that of Sergt. Cleary, those few thrilling months of yesterday. There are but few of the smaller towns of America, where the military history of the community extends back to 1914, for in this place at that time there was

fantry "over the top." We talk frequently of "over the top," but only the soldier who has awaited the signal for that exploit, knows what it all means, the thoughts, the anxiety, the nervousness. The emperor's tottering armies, already broken by our own glorious 27th Division, are making a desperate last stand to prevent the crossing of the river, and the flower of the German army is contesting every foot of the ground with those boys whom some of our people only a short time ago had characterized as "tin" soldiers. In the rear, the American heavy and light artillery, their smooth guns manned by Everyboy, were putting over a terrific barrage fire, to pave and clear the way for the coming advance of the dough boys. And to this fire the German guns were answering in kind. And so we can sense the feelings of Sergt. Cleary and the other boys from Avon nearby. And then—as far as one lad is concerned, it all ends—there's a crash, a shell explodes, Sergt. Cleary crumples down, a drop or two of blood is on the forehead. There's a cry of distress from his comrades, Everyboy exposes himself recklessly to get to his side. Kindly they pick him up, pillow his head on their laps—but the Great Adventure for good old "Matty" Cleary is ended. Like the Crusader of old, he played the game, but for bigger stakes than any Crusader ever played. A few minutes later the signal come, the troops swept on, they crossed the river, and the day was won.

At St. Agnes Church a solemn requiem mass was sung by the Rev. Edward J. Lyons of St. Peter and Paul's Church of Elmira, a former Avon boy, as celebrant. The Rev. George T. Jones of Geneseo, a service man, was deacon, and the Rev. Father J. J. Ganey of the State School at Industry, likewise a service man was sub deacon. The Rev. Father James T. Wood of Craig Colony was master of ceremonies. In the sanctuary were the Rev. Father Farrell of Lima, the Rev. McGillicuddy of Niagara University, the Rev. Cornelius Hogan of Rochester, and the Rev. Father William Darcy of Avon.

Departing from the custom of the Roman Catholic Church not to give a sermon at funerals, the Rev. Father Jones spoke tenderly and feelingly. He said that at first he was not in favor of bringing the bodies home from France, but as he saw more of funerals like this one, and what it all meant, and the lesson it taught, he had changed his mind. He recall-

in this place at that time there was a National Guard outfit, and Guard companies are scarce in towns of this size.

And so the spectators saw in their minds the organization of old Troop "M." They saw the man they were honoring that day, as a mere lad, mustered into the cavalry service of the state. It's unkind to say it now, but we've been waiting seven years to say it, but some of you must recall what you said about the "tin" soldiers, and some of you must have felt awful bad when you saw that lad's body borne along the street. You remember the days of play of the troop, the little tours of duty, the small arms competition, the camp at Fishkill. All play then, to most of you, but what a training those boys with Matty were getting at the hands of his troop commander Shiverick, and then came more serious days. The raid at Columbus is recalled. There were rumors of trouble in the air. Breathlessly things "picked up" at the armory. Preparation was in the air. And one night the blow fell, and the entire National Guard from the Canadian border to the Gulf and from the Atlantic to the Pacific was mobilized.

Again they think. It took but a few seconds to recall those days of sorrow and happiness alike on the Border, and to see our own boys back home again. We all breathed a prayer of thanksgiving, our boys were safe again.

And then came the Great Adventure for four millions of Everyboy, our boy among them. We picture them coming to the great camps all over America, from every section. "M" Troop was on the march early, and Matty Cleary again rode away with them. We see the 1st Cavalry transformed until machine gun outfits, and eventually we see them arriving in France, we see them in the training area, and later we see them on the battle line.

This remember, is just a picture that we saw of Matty Cleary, but similar scenes were being enacted with the chief players from almost every home in the country.

The story of Sergt. Cleary's heroic death has been written on several occasions in the columns of this paper. Our readers are familiar with it. They have pictured this lithe, athletic, well trained non-commissioned officer, crouching in his little machine gun "nest" with Jim Leonard of Geneseo, near the LaSelle River, at the zero hour this crisp fall morning, awaiting the final word that would send the American in-

all meant, and the lesson it taught, he had changed his mind. He recalled the heroism of the American soldier as he observed it, on the battle fields of France. He recounted the cost of war, not from the money standpoint, but from the moral side. He told of the American soldiers' reticence of speaking of the horrible nightmare thru which he had passed. He said that wars never could be eliminated, but asked that things be done that would make it harder to bring them on. Father Jones speaks in a pleasing tone, he had a message to tell, and the impression of his talk will have its influence upon the lives of those who heard it.

At the conclusion of the mass the procession again formed and moved to the beautiful St. Agnes Cemetery, where burial was made. After the impressive committal ceremony of the Roman Catholic Church, the ritualistic service of the American Legion was read, then a detail of "M" Troop men, some of whom started their military career at the same minute as did Matty Cleary, fired three volleys over the open grave, then a bugler blew "Taps" the closing of the soldier's day, and as the notes were wafted across the hills, the large gathering stood still for a moment, and the last word of the last chapter in the life drama of Matty Cleary, was written.

During the progress of the funeral business paces of Avon and Caledonia were closed, and as the Avon bells were tolling, if one could have heard that far, he would have also heard the bells of Caledonia, and if he could have seen, he would have observed many with bared heads, some of them breathing a prayer for the repose of the soul of Caledonia's only boy killed in the war.

There were numerous floral offerings, among them one from D Company of the 105th Machine Gun Battalion, one from M Troop, 1st Cavalry New York Guard, and one from the Hon. James W. Wadsworth, Jr., United States Senator from N. Y. former 1st Lieutenant of "M" Troop.

The bearers were Morris Callahan and Flip Griffin of Geneseo, Donald Marsh of Rochester, Wm. E. Hall, Jr. of Avon, Max Bostwick of Caledonia, and Wheeler Davis of L'Avonia.

A guard of honor, that marched beside the caisson conveying the remains, was composed of members of the Avon and Caledonia Posts.

The Legion turned out about one hundred and twenty-five men.

Veterans of every war that America has ever engaged in are sleeping in the Avon cemeteries. And yet, it

is said that this community has witnessed but three military funerals. And in each one, snow lay upon the ground. The first was that of Chas. Barnard, civil war veteran, who died in '64 or '65. Soldiers home on furlough, gave him a military funeral with muffled drums, volleys over the grave, and Taps. The next was that of Thomas Brothers, killed in the Philippines while carrying a wounded comrade of the 21st U. S. Infantry off the field. The 65th Infantry, National Guard New York, furnished a detail. The last was that of Cleary.

Until the time of bringing the body to America, it lay in the American Cemetery at Busigny, Province of Nord, France, and here the people of the town cared for it like as if it were one of their own kin.

And as Father Jones said, it all carries a lesson.

CARD OF THANKS

We desire to extend our heartfelt thanks for the kindness shown to us on the occasion of the funeral of our boy, and for the many kind expressions of sympathy.

James B. Cleary and Family