

World War I Vet Tells of Enlisting In Army at Age 12

Los Angeles — (UPI) — While other boys his age played at the game of war in their backyards, 12-year-old Ernie Wrentmore was dodging real bullets on the battlefields of France during World War I.

A barrage of burning metal slashed his head and hands at one point while he was darting from trench to trench carrying messages to platoon leaders and battalion commanders. Shrapnel ripped through his leg at another. But the medical corpsmen patched him up and he went back to duty.

Bullet Shatters Mask

At Meuse-Argonne, though, an enemy bullet shattered his gas mask and he fell to the ground when deadly vapors blanketed the field. The war had ended for the soldier who was still too young to shave.

It has been 42 years since Ernie Wrentmore ran away from his home in West Farmington, Ohio, changed his name, added six non-existent years to his age and in 1917 became the youngest member of the American army.

Today, Wrentmore is a prosperous Santa Barbara, Calif., businessman and author who hopes to become the oldest living veteran of the first World War.

Compared with most of the "doughboys," he is still a youngster at 54. The others generally range from 60 to 75 years of age. And they are dying off at the rate of 900 a month.

Why he deserted a secure home and dashed off to the dangerous uncertainties of war is a question Wrentmore has been asked a thousand times.

Answer in Book

He answers it in his recently published book, "In Spite of Hell," which has received praise from President Eisenhower and historian Bruce Catton.

"I come from an English heritage and had ancestors who fought in the Revolutionary and Civil Wars," he said. "There was a great deal of discussion in my family about

the Germans as the war progressed.

"I heard so much about the fighting that I became obsessed with the idea of going into the service. So I packed my things and tramped off to Altoona, Pa., where I enlisted."

Wrentmore said the army did not question his age because he was 5 feet 6 inches tall and so ruggedly constructed that he looked at least 18.

Had To Do Man's Job

"But it was quite a gap to bridge from my 12 years to 18 for the other soldiers," he said. "I had to do a man's job and had to maintain even higher quality than the other fellows so no one would suspect me."

Wrentmore said he was so well-developed from hunting, hiking and field work that the physical strain of the war did not bother him as it would most 12-year-olds.

But he added, "I certainly wouldn't recommend it for other youngsters and I wouldn't go through it again though it was a great experience."

For more than a year, his family did not know where Ernie was. His father exhausted the family savings and ignored his successful practice as a physician to search the country for his boy.

Mother Worries

Endless worry plagued his mother. She changed from an attractive middle-aged woman to a trembling semi-invalid. But she never gave up hope that her son would some day return.

Ernie arrived home in 1919 as a bed patient after spending months in a French hospital. The family did not greet him with the reprimand usually reserved for boys who run away from home.

Instead he received a joyous reception, "I was placed on a pedestal by my parents, relatives and friends," he said.

Ten years passed before Wrentmore fully recovered from the effects of gas poisoning. Today, he holds the rank of major in the Air Force re-



WOULD BE OLDEST VET—Ernie Wrentmore, above, today a prosperous businessman in Santa Barbara, Calif., hopes to become the oldest living veteran of World War I. He enlisted in the army in 1917 at the age of 12, telling authorities he was 18. Compared with most of the "doughboys", Wrentmore is still a youngster at 54. (UPI Telephoto)

Tibetan Revolt, Red China Raids Split India Party

By B. K. TIWARI

United Press International

New Delhi — (UPI) — The Tibetan revolt and Communist

China's border raids have caused a three-way split in India's Communist party.

The extremists, burned up at being ousted in Kerala state, are agitating for immediate violent action against the government of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

While the Communists strew, India's ruling Congress party is on the offensive. Prime Minister Nehru has described the Communists as "disgraceful" and criticized their anti-Nationalist activities.

The "right wing" Communists are arguing for continuance of the traditional Indian non-violence policy.

The moderate Communist faction is calling for support of Nehru in his stern attitude toward Red China's border intrusions.

The moderates believe their policy will not make the Indian people suspicious of their aims.

Party on Offensive While the Communists strew, India's ruling Congress party is on the offensive.

Prime Minister Nehru has described the Communists as "disgraceful" and criticized their anti-Nationalist activities.

"So far as I am concerned," Nehru told the All India Congress committee meeting, "there can be no truce with such people."

Nehru's daughter, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the president of the Congress party, said "if we have any controversy with a Communist country, the attitude of the Communist is to lean toward it (the Communist country). But if we have any controversy with any other country, then they are with us."

What has bewildered most Indians is the stand by party leaders on the Chinese border attacks. After some hesitation, the leaders decided to profess their support for Nehru.

Reds Suggest Negotiation But at the same time, the Communists suggested the border disputes should be settled by negotiation. They also indicated the McMahon line, established in 1914 as India's northeastern border with Tibet, should be re-examined.

Everyone was confused, including the Communists. It was at that time the extremists, the moderates and the rightists began going their separate ways.

The confusion led the way to Communist violence in the West Bengal assembly. Communists shook their fists at Congress party members and then hurled shoes at the government benches. The Reds' reputation as a party of non-violence began to crumble.

ALTERATIONS EXTRA New York — (UPI) — For every four dollars spent on new home construction, an additional dollar is spent by homeowners to alter or add to existing dwellings, according to building industry sources.

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