

Memorial Day Reflections on Tough 'Ombres & Noah Gill

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Washington, DC - This year, on Memorial Day, I have had the opportunity to reflect on the sacrifice of many, and the memory of one in our family in particular. From time to time, America has been led by those with lofty ideals. The War to End Wars was an ideal 100 years ago. President Woodrow Wilson worked to make this a reality for all mankind.

Noah Gill fought and died in this war, to end wars. My grand mother cherished the memory of Noah Gill, her brother. She spoke softly his name, conversations about Noah did not come up casually. She spoke his name around Memorial Day, so those of us near to her would know: she loved him, he died in war, defending us. She spoke his name when men were sent off to conflicts, in a way to remind us, that there were sad, life changing consequences to duty and valor. She trusted that those calls to duty to defend were made in our collective wisdom, not individual caprice. She knew, sometimes, those calls to serve and sacrifice were too easily made by those in comfort. Those who would be untouched, protected and ultimately, unconcerned.

Noah Gill had been a barber in Purly, Texas when he joined the 359th Infantry Regiment of the Texas-Oklahoma División, as it was called then. The name was abbreviated to the T-O Division and nicknamed the Tough 'Ombres. Yes, there were Mexican Americans that sacrificed their lives too.

Starting in early October 1918 the American army commanded by General John J. Pershing was deployed in a campaign fighting its way north toward Germany, thru the Argonne Forest. The Tough 'Ombres were an integral part of this campaign. On November 3rd, the American forces advanced and broke the Freya line. With the disintegration of the German defensive line here and along the Western front, Otto von Bismark abdicated the German throne on November 9. The war was ended with an armistice on November 14. It was during this rapidly moving campaign that Private Noah Gill was killed in action on November 4, 1918.

Private Gill was buried in France, as was common at the time. My great grandparents had to raise the money to have him disinterred and returned home: that too was the burden of the family. Today Noah Gill rests in the family cemetery in East Texas.

Noah Gill volunteered to serve about the same time President Donald Trump's grandfather was being expelled from Germany for refusing to serve in the military. A tradition of refusal to serve carried on since the Trump family immigrated to America.

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