

**MILITARY**

The 56th Anniversary of Sea Service Women will be celebrated at a birthday luncheon on Aug. 1 at the MCAS El Toro Officers' Club, Marine Corps Air Station, El Toro.

Special ceremonies will begin at 11 a.m. The price is \$20 per person, and reservations are due by July 27. Call **Bea Hurley** at 991-4185, or **Lynda Smith** at (714) 549-3609 for information.

**MILITARY SERVICE**



**MATULICH**

Air Force Airman **Naomi B. Matulich** has graduated from basic military training at Lackland Air Force Base at San Antonio, Texas.

Matulich is the daughter of **Mike E.** and **Debra L. Matulich** of Brea, and is a 1996 graduate of Brea Olinda High School.

**MILITARY**

Air Force Airman **Marlon J. Castaneda** has graduated from basic military training at Lackland Air Force Base in Texas. Castaneda is the son of **Joan** and stepson of **Terry Crane** of Brea, and is a 1997 graduate of **CASTANEDA** Brea Olinda High School.



**Mark A. Gorden** has joined the U.S. Army Reserve under the Delayed Training Program at the U.S. Army Recruiting Station in Fullerton. Gorden is the

son of **Cheryl A.** and **David H. Gordon** of Brea, and is a student at Brea Olinda High School.

Air Force Cadet **Brent E. Reimer** assisted in the 1998 Boy Scout Freezone at the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs. Reimer is the son of **Greg S.** and **Christine A. Reimer** of Brea, and is a 1997 graduate of Brea Olinda High School.

**Tony J. Matcaroff** has joined the U.S. Army under the Delayed Entry Program at the U.S. Army Recruiting Station in Fullerton. Matcaroff is the son

of **Dianne L. Matcaroff** of Brea.

Air Force Cadet **Brandon J. Tellez** assisted in the 1998 Boy Scout Freezone at the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs. Tellez is the son of **Kathi** and stepson of **Raymund E. Ruhe** of Brea, and is a 1997 graduate of Brea Olinda High School.

**Benjamin S. Ku** has joined the U.S. Army Reserve under the Delayed Training Program at the U.S. Army Recruiting Station in Fullerton. He is the son of **Anita** and **Stanley Ku** of Brea.

# Military service

Air Force Airman **Ibrahim M. Michael** has been graduated from basic military training at Lackland Air Force Base, San Antonio, Texas.



Michael is the son of **Eleanor L. Michael** of Brea. **MICHAEL**

**Jasmine E. Jump** has joined the United States Army under the Delayed Entry Program at the U.S. Army Recruiting Station in Orange. She is the daughter of **Deborah Clark** of Brea.

Navy Seaman Apprentice **Holly M. Ruggieri**, daughter of **Cindy P. Peckham** of Brea, recently completed U.S. Navy basic training at Recruit Training Command, Great Lakes, Ill.

## MILITARY

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**We need you.**



**American Heart  
Association**

# Memories of WWI vivid 70 years later

By Gary A. Warner  
The Register

Nearly 70 years later, Erving Dresser still vividly recalls looking out the winter-fogged window of the German prisoner-of-war camp and wondering why his guards were behaving so foolishly.

"They were dancing and shouting and throwing their guns in the air," Dresser said. "Nobody knew what was going on."

Within minutes Dresser was dancing too: World War I — The Great War, the War to End All Wars — was over.

For most people, the bloody con-

flict that lurched to an end seven decades ago Friday is a distant event confined to scratchy recordings of "Over There" and figures marching herky-jerky in ancient newsreels.

But for Dresser and a dwindling number of Orange County residents in their late 80s and 90s, World War I was a time to kill or be killed on the faraway fields of France.

"Sometimes it seems like people have forgotten what it was like," said World War I veteran Cecil Kepler of Orange.

With their comrades dying at a

rate of 250 per day, the former doughboys worry that what they did when the century was young will become as remote to Americans as the Civil War or the Revolution.

"Out of about 4.7 million who served, there are about 100,000 left, according to the Pentagon," said veteran Ed Couron of Garden Grove.

America was a late arrival to World War I, which began June 28, 1914, when a Bosnian nationalist assassinated Archduke Francis Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary. The murder set in motion several

treaties, and by August, England and France were at war with Germany, Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire.

Millions had died in the trench warfare by the time the United States entered the struggle in April 1917. Promises by President Wilson to "keep America neutral" melted away as Germany threatened to torpedo US ships bringing supplies to England.

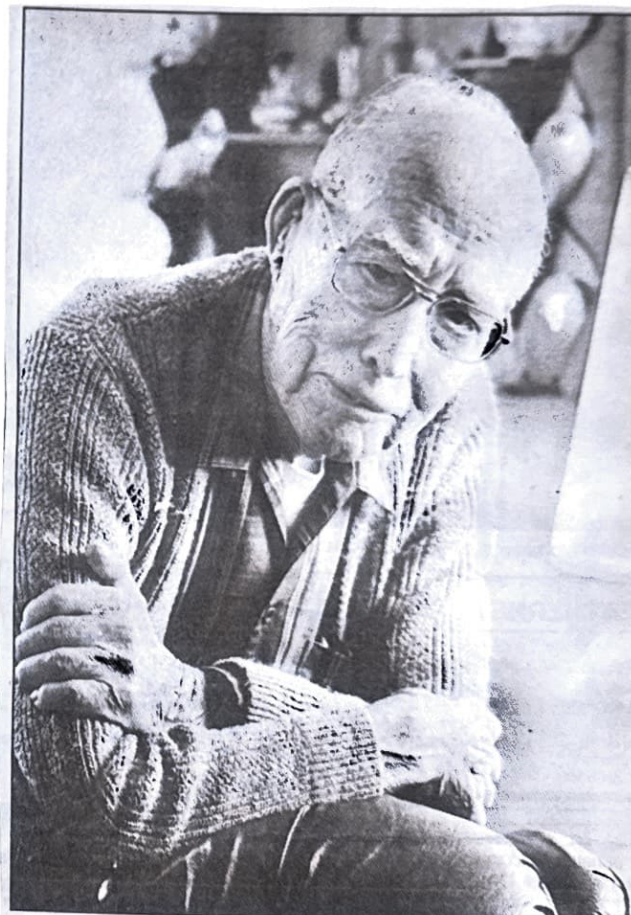
By the time the armistice was signed in a stuffy railway car in the Compiegne Forest on Nov. 11, 1918, 2 million doughboys had joined up

Please see **VETERANS/3**



Photo courtesy of Erving Dresser

Erving Dresser, far left, of Anaheim in a 1918 photo with other prisoners of war near Darmstadt, Germany.



Bill Alkofer/The Register

Erving Dresser was a veteran of the 1916 campaign in Mexico against Pancho Villa when his National Guard unit went to France during WWI.

# VETERANS: Their numbers are dwindling

FROM 1

or been drafted to serve; 116,516 died for the cause.

In all, the lives of 8.3 million soldiers and 5 million civilians were lost in combat and from an influenza epidemic that swept through the battle-ravaged countries late in the war. Some historians put civilian casualties much higher.

The struggle in Europe seemed very far away to Iowa-born Couron, now 89, when he answered the call to arms. By July 1918, Pvt. Couron was at the Champagne-Marne front as part of the famed Rainbow Division.

"We were to hold our ground and kill and kill as many as we could until they'd had their fill," Couron said.

A massive German barrage rained shells on Couron's unit, which was packed into dugouts so tightly that men fainted for lack of oxygen.

When the barrage ended, Couron's unit was ordered to take up positions on a rock quarry.

"You could look across the field, down a long slope and see the Germans coming over at daybreak," Couron said. "The French had lined up their 75mm's for over a mile right close together. When the Germans came over, they just fired right into the Germans point-blank. There were dead bodies as far as you could see."

Couron, who was wounded in an artillery barrage July 28, 1918, that killed 17 men in his platoon, said the war was a waste, with farmers and factory workers dying to save teetering European empires.

"I feel it's stupidity to begin with," Couron said. "It's unjustified that any government can sit down and work a deal out where they kill off all the poor people, all the working class people, just to satisfy themselves."

Dresser was already a veteran of the 1916 campaign in Mexico

against Pancho Villa when his Connecticut National Guard unit was sent to France.

Dresser thought the war would be a good chance to see the world, but he ended up seeing more of Germany than he cared to.

Dresser's misfortune began in France, where he was injured in a German mustard-gas attack and sent to a hospital.

"I was taken care of by a very nice French countess," Dresser said.

Dresser was on the way back to join his unit when, on the night of April 20, 1918, he rested for the night in a camp that was the target of a small German raiding party.

Wounded by a grenade, Dresser was captured by Wehrmacht soldiers who patched him up. After a short hospital stay, Dresser was forced to join a group of French, British and US prisoners of war who toured Germany as part of a propaganda campaign to show German citizens the face of the enemy.

"I think I saw every major city in Germany," Dresser said.

In late August, Dresser was sent to a prisoner-of-war camp near Darmstadt, where he helped coordinate Red Cross activities until the armistice.

Photos of the time show a POW camp complete with tea service and paintings on the walls, a far cry from the stalags of World War II and the tiger cages of Vietnam.

The Germans were gentlemanly "if you did what you were told," Dresser said. But the Americans did not always play by the rules.

"Someone would escape and some of the fellows would run around behind ranks during roll call, answering for them so the Germans wouldn't know how many

were missing," Dresser said.

When the armistice came, Dresser and the other POWs were marched into Darmstadt, loaded on trains and sent back to France. Dresser smiles when he remembers his return to Bristol, Conn., as a 23-year-old veteran of two military campaigns.

"I can still remember walking up my street and here's my mother running down the road to meet me," Dresser said.

Cecil Kepler, now 91, joined up with the Indiana National Guard in Gary on March 29, 1917. When the war broke out, his unit was assigned to training recruits in Mississippi before being shipped over to France in September.

"We were some of the first Americans overseas in France, so we created quite an audience among the younger generation," Kepler said.

Though kept in reserve during most of the war, Kepler's unit was assigned to the front in the fall of 1918 and told to prepare for a battle — a battle that never came.

"We saw military cars on the roadway that had a small American flag displayed on their front fenders. ... That was against all the rules," Kepler said. "Later that day, we found out there was an armistice. That was November 11, 1918."

The war was a very different experience for George Reed, now 87.

Like Kepler, Reed was a native of Indiana. He was working in New York City when the war broke out.

"I decided to join up," Reed said. "I wanted to be a soldier, see the world, even if it meant risking my life."

But Reed is black and in the early 1900s, blacks found that the most the Army would let them do was peel potatoes and stockpile food.

Though Reed never saw the bullets while a quartermaster with the Rainbow Division in France, he shared the cold, the hunger and the homesickness of other soldiers.

"The food was pretty bad — corn Willy, pork and beans, hardtack,"

Reed said. "But when you are hungry, it seems like ice cream and cake to you."

Reed said that while work filled most of the day, there was time to have fun.

"We had some guys in our unit from New Orleans — Creoles — who kept trying to talk French to the French, especially the girls," Reed said. "But it was different. They really didn't understand."

After the war, Reed stayed in the army, retiring as a master sergeant at the end of World War II. But Kepler, Dresser and Couron were back in civilian life by the fall of 1919. Kepler and Dresser worked in construction. Couron, a bugler during the war, toured with a band after the war and in 1930 formed a state-champion drum and bugle corps in Santa Ana.

"I did a little of everything after that," Couron said.

Couron was the first of the group to move to Orange County, settling in Santa Ana in 1930 and building his own home in Garden Grove in 1948. Dresser, though a Southern Californian since 1920, did not move to Anaheim until 1982. Kepler came to Anaheim in 1970 and moved to Orange in 1977.

Despite vivid memories of France, none of the former doughboys ever has returned to Europe.

"I always wanted to, but I never thought I could afford it. I always wanted to go back to France and see the old battlefields," Couron said.

The Veterans Administration reported in March that 13,000 World War I-era veterans were living in California, 950 in Orange County.

But Couron and the other veterans say that number seems high and that Orange County veterans groups popular even a few years ago are now dormant.

"The West Orange County barracks of World War I veterans — one of four in the county — had 168 members in 1972," Couron said. "We disbanded a few years back. There were only four of us left, and the other three weren't combat veterans. It's a shame."