

"Pfc. Charles H. Cooper, a Carroll County Marine in the Great War"

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By Jay A. Graybeal

The Marines are coming! Next month the Carroll County Detachment of the Marine Corps League will host the Maryland State Marine Corps League Convention. The event will take place over the weekend of June 22-23rd at the Comfort Inn in Westminster.

Although the Marine Corps traces its heritage to the time of the Revolution, local men did not serve in any great numbers until the First World War. America's entry into World War I in April 1917 resulted in a greatly enlarged military including the Marine Corps. From a pre-war strength of 13,725, the Corps grew to 72,963 men by the Armistice on 11 November 1918. During the war, Marine ground forces maintained garrisons in several Caribbean locations and in China, guarded naval installations, served on board naval vessels and fought with the American Expeditionary Forces. Marine Aviators flew patrols over American and European waters and attacked German submarines and their bases in Belgium.

Twenty-five Carroll County men served in the Marine Corps during the war. Five served overseas with the 5th Marine Regiment, a unit of the Army's 2nd Division. Of these men, Pvts. Carl W. Beasman and Harry V. Brooks, were killed in action and Pvts. Edward L. Brown and Charles H. Cooper were wounded. Sgt. Charles H. Cole and Pvt. Robey E. Spencer served overseas with the 11th Marine Regiment but did not see combat. Sgt. Joseph H. Hoppe served with the Northern Bombing Group, an aviation unit composed of Navy and Marine squadrons headquartered in St. Ingelvert, France. Their mission was to bomb the German submarine bases in Ostend, Zeebrugge and Bruges, Belgium. Seven Carroll County Marines served at prewar American installations in Santo Domingo, Cuba, Haiti and Nicaragua. Two local Marines served on board U. S. Naval vessels; the remaining Marines served at Marine installations in the U. S.

The collections of the Historical Society of Carroll County contain uniforms, photographs and manuscripts related to local Marines who served in World War I and other conflicts. The largest collection originally belonged to Pfc. Charles Henry Cooper, of Hampstead. The collection includes Cooper's forest green winter service uniform, decorations, personal items and nearly 100 letters and postcards sent home to his family.

Pfc. Cooper wrote home nearly every other day during his training at Parris Island, S. C. and Quantico, Va., from August 1917 to February 1918 when he went overseas. His letters reveal much about his training and about his thoughts on serving in the Marines. His first communication to his family was a postcard, "am writing this card on board the Merrick expect to reach Savanna, Ga. 7 p.m. tonight. did not leave Balto until 10:30 p.m. Wed. night so you might know I was some tired. I have been feeling fine as a Buck eating three meals a day. My friend has been sick very near all the time. will write and send address as soon as I get there."

Cooper, still a civilian, arrived safely and his first letter home tells of his trip from Baltimore:

Landed at Port Royal about 7 p.m. Sunday night. Was very tired but as soon as we got here sat down to supper that tastes good but not compared to what we got on the boat. It is very warm down here. I guess we will be examined and sworn in some time soon. Just as soon as I get my uniform I will ship my

suit case and all the clothes I do not need. While I was writing this letter I was called out to be vaccinated. Well I have enjoyed the trip so far very nice of course it is not on the farm. The oranges and peaches come in very nice have some of the oranges yet. That fellow that started from Balto. with me is a bughouse the fellows on the boat made a fool out of him. There were eight came from Balto [one] of them is from Westminster. We can write as much as we please and when we please if we can just find time. You folks can write as much as you please but do not write until I give you the right address this is not the right address. I understand it may be some time before we can do that will send it as soon as possible. I did not get sea sick as I expected but felt a little home sick once in a while that is natural. Well I guess I will have to close this time. If you see Reba find out from her if she got her letter. I am going to write her very near the same so you can find out through each other. Well kiss all for me.
Chas.

Pvt. Cooper enlisted on 1 August 1917 and was assigned to a training company at Parris Island, S. C. After an initial period of training, he was assigned to 133rd Company, 6th Marines on 8 January 1918; his new unit was stationed at Quantico, Va. Shortly after being assigned to this unit, Pfc. Cooper learned that he was being sent overseas. His last letter from Quantico was written on 4 February 1918 and in it he tried to calm his mother's fears, "Mom do not worry about me now, I will take the best care of myself where ever I may go. I guess it will be some time before we can get word to each other but we all will have to make the best of it." He added a post script, "I will knock the D. out of the first G. I see." Pfc. Cooper was assigned to the 51st Co., 5th Marine Regiment, a unit of the Army's 2nd Division. The division was commanded by Major General John A. Lejeune, U.S.M.C., from July, 1918, to August 1919. Unfortunately, Pfc. Cooper's letters written while overseas have not survived. Pfc. Cooper saw combat in the Toulon-Troyon Sector, Aisne, Chateau-Thierry Sector, Aisne-Marne, Marbache Sector, Limey Sector, and the St. Mihiel and the Meuse-Argonne Offensives. He was promoted to private first class on 1 October 1918 and wounded three days later by a machine gun bullet in the right chest. The wound took him out of combat and resulted in an honorable discharge for medical disability on 23 June 1919. Partially disabled, he was awarded a monthly compensation of \$30. A year later he was awarded a French Fourragere, in the colors of the Croix de Guerre, representing the French citations for gallantry given to his unit. Pfc. Cooper attached the Fourragere to his forest green uniform along with his Good Conduct and Victory Medals, chevrons representing his service overseas and his wound and the Indian head shoulder sleeve insignia of the 2nd Division.

Pfc. Cooper's letters, uniform and personal items were donated to the Historical Society by his son Charles Elwood Cooper who was also a Marine. He served in combat during the Korean War with 2nd Section Machine Gun, 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines and was wounded two times. The younger Cooper also donated his Korean War uniforms to the Historical Society. The Cooper Collection provides a visual and written record of two generations of Carroll County Marines who served and were wounded in combat.

All Marines are welcome to attend the upcoming convention. For more information about the event please call David R. Bennett at 775-7755.

Photo Caption: Pfc. Charles H. Cooper, U. S. Marine Corps, c. 1918. Pfc. Cooper wore his forest green winter service uniform; the shoulder sleeve insignia, a red Indian head and white star on a blue shield, was adopted by the 5th Marines who served with the Army's 2nd Division. Each of the two gold lace chevrons on his lower left sleeve represented six months of overseas service. Not visible on his lower right sleeve is a single gold lace chevron representing his 4 October 1918 wound. The silver "MARKSMAN" badge on his left breast pocket. Historical Society of Carroll County collection, gift of Charles E. Cooper, 1993.