

PENNSYLVANIA

A HISTORY

Editor-in-Chief

GEORGE P. DONEHOO

*Former Secretary of the Pennsylvania Historical Commission
and State Librarian; Collaborator of the Hand-
book of American Indians, Etc.*

With Introduction by

THOMAS L. MONTGOMERY

*Librarian of the Historical Society
of Pennsylvania*

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EDWARD H. BAIR, JR., was born in Greensburg, Pennsylvania, April 9, 1895, son of Edward H. Bair (q. v.) and Esther M. (Suydam) Bair. He attended school in his native town and had advanced to the sophomore year in the high school when he entered Mercersburg Academy in the fall of 1913. The following year he attended the Kiskiminetas Preparatory School, from which he was graduated in June, 1915. He then entered the Pennsylvania State College and became a member of the Sigma Alpha Epsilon Fraternity. In his second year (1917) he joined the State College Unit and was accepted as a student in the First Officers' Training Camp at Fort Niagara. After remaining there eight weeks he was released on account of his youthful appearance and underweight. Anxious to continue in the service, he returned home and with considerable difficulty and delay finally succeeded in being admitted to the Headquarters Company of the Tenth Regiment of the National Guard of Pennsylvania, known near and far as the "Fighting Tenth," which was afterwards merged into the One Hundred and Tenth United States Infantry.

On September 7, 1917, the regiment left for Camp Hancock, at Augusta, Georgia. While there he performed detached service as an orderly. On April 23 the regiment was moved to the point of embarkation at Camp Merritt, near New York, and sailed on May 3, arriving in France, May 17. Upon entering active service in the battle front he was continued as an orderly and largely on account of his daring and fearless disposition, he was selected as a runner to drive the only motorcycle with a side car in the regiment. In this side car it was frequently his duty to carry officers on important missions of service over the battlefield, often being obliged to travel at night without lights. On these missions in a strange country on several occasions he found himself in "No Man's Land," and on at least, one occasion that we know of, he was lost and was for two days and a night without food before he could again ascertain the location of his regiment. It will be understood in this connection that the duties of an orderly, or runner, as he is called, are of great importance and are necessarily extremely hazardous.

During the second Battle of the Marne the allied forces were on the defensive and were unable to gauge the strength of the enemy. On July 17, a strange circumstance, strange, indeed, as the most marvelous fiction, occurred, which gave the allied forces indisputable evidence of the punishment they were inflicting on the enemy and of the enemy's weakness. This circumstance is best told by Dr. Francis A. La Violette, pastor of Queen Anne Meth-

odist Episcopal Church of Seattle, Washington, who was then with the American Forces doing special Young Men's Christian Association work. In a letter dated September 14, 1918, addressed to the parents of "Cubby" Bair, as he was commonly called, he says:

On the evening of the 17th of July a German carrier pigeon flew into the farm house window where our Regimental Headquarters was located, about a mile south of Conde-on-Brie, a short distance from Chateau-Thierry. A missive was found on its legs and when translated from the German read: 'We must have more reinforcements if we are to hold this line.' Immediately the message was sent up to General Giebold's Headquarters, your son Edward taking the side car with a French Lieutenant riding therein. They brought back the aluminum case but the General refused to give me the message.

The commanding officers, on receiving the information revealing the weakness of the enemy, at once threw their entire forces against the German lines and forced them to retreat across the Marne. This was the beginning of our offensive operations in the second Battle of the Marne, on the early morning of July 18th. On July 30, the fourth day's battle of the Ourcq, which was a continuation of the Battle of the Marne, the 110th Infantry was in the advance and formed the first line. The Germans were being driven from the hill and covered their retreat by shelling our entire field. It was during their retreat and the terrible shelling on the part of the Germans that Edward H. Bair, Jr., was killed, in the Village of Courmont. The story of his death cannot be better told than by quoting from a letter written to his parents by Captain Charles Schall, Chaplain of the 110th Regiment and pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Greensburg:

The death of your son caused great sadness to his comrades and the deepest personal grief to me, for we were frequently associated in the work of the Regiment and went on missions of service quite often. We came to know each other intimately and I was greatly delighted with his splendid qualities. Edward was in the Regimental Headquarters building with a number of others and was killed outright. The shell which struck the building was a high explosive of large caliber and wrecked it completely. I was not far away and rushed up as quickly as I could. We recovered the body of your son from the debris and alongside of him was that of Harrison Null. After preparations were made we reverently and tenderly buried these two young Americans in graves that are side by side and distinctly marked. You should have the consciousness that Edward was in the place he should have been. His duties were at Regimental Headquarters and I assure you he was there not out of idle curiosity or for any other reason than that of duty.

We cannot refrain in this connection from quoting again from Dr. La Violette's letter. In it he says:

Ned was more to me than most of the boys. I suppose Hamilton, another orderly was killed at the same time. These two boys were very dear friends and always did what they could to make my work easier. The last time I saw Ned was in the street called Rue St. Martin, in Chateau-Thierry. He was looking so well and I would have passed by if it had not been for his cheery hail. We had a fine talk and parted with full expectation of seeing each other again and with my personal promise to carry to you at Greensburg the message I gave when in your city.

A communication from his commanding officer says, "A short ten minutes before the fatal shell struck the Regimental Headquarters I spoke to him about how close the Boche were getting to us. He smiled and said, "Yes, Captain, he must be after us." This was his last utterance of which we have any record.

A prominent member of the Westmoreland bar has written of Edward H. Bair, Jr., and so truly has he pictured him that the author of this sketch sees fit to quote from his letter as follows:

I knew Ned as I saw him in school and in the young life of the town. He was one of those boys that you watch with delight as the purposes of life develop. It is only the aimless, drifting, dissolute life that fails to awaken our interest, but the young man who is shaping a worthy purpose, who is developing an individuality, who is dynamic with energy, always excites interest and makes appeal to our attention. Ned's life displayed these qualities, and, therefore, his sad death visits a distinct loss on the community as well as upon his parents.

Thus was cut down at the very threshold of manhood, one of the most promising young men of Greensburg. When he heard the call of his country, arrangements had already been made that when his college course would be completed he should take up the study of Insurance as a profession, that he might equip himself to enable him to assist in perpetuating the business in which his father is engaged.

It is the present intention of his parents to have his remains brought home when the government will permit, and inter them in the family burial plot in St. Clair Cemetery.
