

## REMEMBRANCE OF BERNHARD



Bernhard died 89 years ago on Oct. 8, 1918; just 31 days before the end of WW I.... He was 28. Over the years, his name was occasionally mentioned within the family. Usually it was in the context of, "Oh, he was Tony's brother that died in France during WW I." Not much more was ever said than that. And now, 89 years after his death, sadly, not much more is known than that about his life here in Minnesota. While we have a little better understanding of his time in the military, this too is incomplete. But what we do know, we can thank our cousin Alene Grover for her research and dogged determination in genealogy.

We know that Bernhard was one of the 116,708 US military men that were killed in World War I. We know that even though the war was drawing to a close, the battles were more intense than ever. This fact is borne out through Bernhard's unit's combat history. Put bluntly, the week of his death was hell on earth. That week was comprised of some very bleak and frightening days for the young men from the farmlands of Minnesota, the hills of South Dakota and a hundred small towns and big cities around the country. 2 days before his death, Bernhard wrote home saying, "I have seen so many bad things that I hope I never see anything like this again." Both the allied forces and the axis powers were locked in combat throughout the Montbrehain region of France. The simple farms and quiet forests became killing grounds for both sides. While some battles are waged by faceless pilots at high altitudes or by artillery cannons lobbing their artillery shells at the enemy several miles away; on this week --- in this region ----- Bernhard's unit was engaged in close-quarter combat --- trench warfare --- and in numerous examples recorded, the fighting got very personal --- with hand-to-hand, and eye-to-eye death struggles.

We also know that for actions during that week of fighting, 8 soldiers from his unit received the Medal of Honor for individual acts of bravery "above and beyond the call of duty". These awards; our nations highest military honor; testify to the large scale, and very intense fighting, that was being witnessed in the area. Two citations from men of Bernhard's unit speak to the intensity of the fighting that day:

"Continuing the remaining 800 yards alone, Sgt Hall advanced on the enemy machine gun post alone killing all 5 members of the crew with his bayonet."

And another:

“Sgt. Hilton, pressed on toward the machine gun nest. During his assault, he was wounded from a bursting shell that would result in the loss of his arm. Undaunted, he continued forward, firing his rifle until his ammunition was exhausted, and then used his pistol. By the end of his advance, he had silenced the machine gun -- killing 6 of the enemy and captured 10.”

We'll never know what actions Bernhard may have been involved in that final day. For all we know, he could have been wounded when he volunteered to bring up more ammo, as his nephew Lester Hegland was to do some 20 years later, again in France. Or he may have been on a patrol as his great nephew; Cary Chapman was, when he was wounded in Vietnam, some 45 years later. His actions may have been truly heroic; the things that legends are made of..... or he may have just been doing his assigned job. We'll never know, as there was no one to witness and recount the circumstances.

But he WAS there.... and he gave his all..... And for that, we remember him and are grateful for his sacrifice.

People and politicians often speak of the soldier fighting and dying for love of country; for his God; or for some lofty political or intangible ideal like “freedom” or “liberty.” But for those that have been in combat -- they understand the true meaning of why men make the sacrifices they make. They do it for love of their fellow soldier. They do it for love of their brother in arms. Shakespeare said it best, in *King Henry V*, Act IV, Scene III when he said, “We few, we happy few, **We Band of Brothers**, For he today that sheds his blood with me shall be my brother.”

Bernhard rests today in Bony France, with thousands of his “brothers” that were killed during the intense fighting. Though he may rest half a world away.....today, he is here with us as we remember, and honor his service.

Written by Scott Hegland  
Bernhard's great nephew