

## A History of Freeburg in the First World War: As Told by the Freeburg Tribune

Daniel Eppel

---

The First World War affected the lives of people across the entire world and continues to influence events today. It is easy to look at an event this big and use it to study the major changes that Europe and the rest of the world underwent as a result. But with a topic as large and all-encompassing as the First World War, it can be hard to look at and study how it affected the everyday lives of people living half a world away, in areas completely untouched by the fighting. Though hard, it is not impossible. This essay will look at the history of a small town in Illinois called Freeburg and examine how it was impacted by the First World War. Freeburg is fortunate in that there exists an almost complete collection of every newspaper printed by the local paper, the *Freeburg Tribune*, during the war, thereby providing a solid foundation for the study of its past.

In this paper I will examine the lives of Freeburg's residents, as told in the pages of the *Tribune*. It offers a picture of the town before and during the war, the men who fought on the warfront, and how the citizens on the home front in Freeburg made significant contributions to the war. Freeburg was, and remains, a small town with many families that for generations have called it home. Freeburg is truly lucky to have such a wealth of information about its past so easily accessible to anyone who wishes to look.

Before the United States entered the Great War the conflict was very far removed from the daily lives of the people living in Freeburg. There was actually little to no mention of the war other than occasional articles and entertainment based fiction about spies and intrigue in Europe. These stories and articles depicted the war and the Germans in very unrealistic and sometimes comical ways. One article told a story about a group of German soldiers, who, at night, accidentally repaired a British communication wire before being captured. The writing suggests that the Germans were stupid and lumbering men who should not be taken seriously as threats.<sup>61</sup>

In fact, most of the reporting in the *Freeburg Tribune* was dedicated to the description of birthdays, deaths, and day-to-day events affecting the lives of the town's residents and its visitors. Today, it does not make for very exciting reading. The closest the newspaper had to an 'interesting' story at the time was when the body of a resident, George Vogel, was undergoing a postmortem medical examination and was discovered to have a broken arm, an injury he did not have when last seen alive. This led some people to believe that there was some form of foul play involved. It was later revealed the limb was broken by the nurse after he had already died. It is interesting to note that in the same issue that the mistake was reported in, there was also an ad looking to hire a new nurse for the town.<sup>62</sup> Another example of the somewhat carefree attitude of Freeburg before the war can be seen in an article declaring two men as 'Heroes of the Burg'. A team of mules had begun to walk around town with no driver present, until G.C Huber and Ruben Browning put a stop to the mules' slow jaunt.<sup>63</sup> The first real reporting on the impact of the Great War occurred in the March 30<sup>th</sup>, 1917 issue of the *Tribune*. An article discussed the massive casualties of the war thus far, citing a number of over 10,000,000 men. It is also in this issue that the Postmaster of the

---

<sup>61</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, July 7, 1916; *Freeburg Tribune*, March 2, 1917.

<sup>62</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, February 23, 1917; *Freeburg Tribune*, March 9, 1917.

<sup>63</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, March 2, 1917.

town, John Reuter, began to accept applications for the armed forces.<sup>64</sup> This was before President Wilson declared war on Germany in the first week of April 1917.

Just after the Postmaster began accepting applications, the first group of young men from Freeburg went to St. Louis to take their enlistment examinations. Eight of them went, though only four were enlisted at the time. One of them, Dewey McBride, would later go on to earn a Silver Cross.<sup>65</sup> Though war was declared in the previous week, since this was a weekly newspaper it was the April 13<sup>th</sup> issue that reported on the declaration of war against Germany. Not much commentary was provided, and the article itself mostly focused on the official proclamation. On the other hand, a patriotic song was published that encouraged all the young men to sign up for the military and defend their country and save the people of Europe from the rule of German tyrants. This is the first sign of the patriotism that later ran rampant through Freeburg during the war.<sup>66</sup> Another example of this patriotism is that for the first time ever, there was a shortage of flags in the area. The patriotic fervor that had gripped people had caused the supply of flags to rapidly disappear and caused the remaining ones to nearly double in price.<sup>67</sup>

The *Tribune* also began to encourage the farmers in the area to employ schoolboys as farmhands instead of the usual young adult workers, to free up the men of fighting age so that they could go to war. In the same issue the *Tribune* informed the town there would be a census to help determine how many men in the country were of fighting age.<sup>68</sup> From here on out, the war is something that is always on the mind of Freeburg's citizens. It is difficult to not find some sort of story about the war in almost every issue of the *Tribune*. The newspaper began to publish articles about the organization of the various branches of the armed forces, likely to further encourage young men to sign up, while at the same time helping them choose a branch of service in which to enlist.<sup>69</sup>

Besides encouraging young men to enlist, they also tried to discourage anyone who might try to shirk their duty. For example, the *Tribune* warned the young men of Freeburg that getting married would not help them avoid the war. Anyone married after the declaration of war against Germany would not be exempt from military service. They also informed any bootleggers in the area that they would receive a pardon if they agreed to sign up for military service. The *Tribune* was also not afraid to use scare tactics to get men to sign up,

Slackers who sneaked away from registering June 5, and now find themselves facing prison sentences and compulsory military service at the end of their incarceration, will get no sympathy from the public at large. Instead, they will be viewed with scorn and disgust, and to their dying day they will carry the obloquy which they have smeared themselves.<sup>70</sup>

There continued to be calls for men to enlist, as well as a call for the local farmers to grow more food than usual so that they could help supply foodstuffs to the forces that would be going to Europe.<sup>71</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, March 30, 1917.

<sup>65</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, April 6, 1917; "Valor Awards for Dewey T. McBride." Military Times Hall of Valor. Accessed November 5, 2014. <http://projects.militarytimes.com/citations-medals-awards/recipient.php?recipientid=75681>.

<sup>66</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, April 13, 1917.

<sup>67</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, April 27, 1917.

<sup>68</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, April 27, 1917.

<sup>69</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, April 27, 1917.

<sup>70</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, June 22, 1917.

<sup>71</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, May 4, 1917; *Freeburg Tribune*, May 11, 1917.

Initially, seventeen men from Freeburg signed up for the armed forces to “do their bit.” The editor noted that for a town as small as Freeburg, that was a large percentage of men. One of them, Dewy McBride, was a US Marine who was deployed with the 15<sup>th</sup> Company, and was among the first Americans to fight in France. Not all of Freeburg’s military men were sent to France however. One of them, William Grommet, was deployed with the Fourth Illinois Regiment to East St. Louis, to help control a race riot that had broken out.<sup>72</sup> Later that month, seventy-one more men were called to take a physical examination to determine if they met the qualifications to be drafted. Of those seventy-one, around thirty of them were deemed acceptable for service.<sup>73</sup> The town was very proud of its new military men, and the *Tribune* published a message for all the new service men: “you are to fight in the noblest cause in which men ever took up arms and for a nation the most generous in all the world to her soldier sons.” The rest of the town had the same enthusiasm, and on August 16<sup>th</sup>, 1917, an ice-cream social was held for all the new servicemen at the Baptist Sunday School, free of charge. There were even more reasons to celebrate, as William Grommet, who had previously been in East St. Louis putting down the riot, was able to return home and get married before being deployed to France.<sup>74</sup>

After the first of Freeburg’s soldiers went to Europe, it was not until September that the first letters started arriving home. The first of these to be published in the *Tribune* was from Phil Schiek. In his letter Schiek talked about how he had just arrived in England. He said that he and the other men had been greeted by a parade upon their arrival, but had yet to see any combat. He said that he was enjoying life in the army thus far.<sup>75</sup> The letter from Phil Schiek caused a slight problem between the *Freeburg Tribune* and the newspaper of a nearby town, the *Belleville News Democrat*. The *Democrat*’s editor, Mr. Brandenbeig, published Schiek’s letter, and claimed that he was from Belleville. This caused the *Tribune*’s editor to tell Brandenbeig to “sweep the bowwebs from his brain and know the people whom he writes about.”<sup>76</sup>

The good-natured tone of Phil Schiek’s letters was incredibly short lived. His second letter home, which arrived later in the same month, depicted the war as something terrible. In this letter he revealed that he was now in France and had begun to see combat. He described the war as “a million times worse” than hell. He complained about the wet and mud he had to live in, the inadequate pay, and described his commanding officer, a General Sherman, as a drunk and crazy. He also warned all the drafted men in the town that had yet to be shipped to training camps that the ‘fun’ of the war would wear off when they reached France.<sup>77</sup>

Between the end of September and the middle of October 1917, nineteen of the drafted men were sent to Camp Zachary Taylor in Louisville, Kentucky.<sup>78</sup> The town gave these men a parade sendoff, which consisted of thirty-six cars adorned with flags, and many of their friends and family lined the streets. The Red Cross also provided each man with tobacco, candy, and

---

<sup>72</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, July 6, 1917.

<sup>73</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, July 27, 1917; *Freeburg Tribune*, August 17, 1917.

<sup>74</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, August 3, 1917; *Freeburg Tribune*, September 7, 1917.

<sup>75</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, September 7, 1917.

<sup>76</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, September 14, 1917.

<sup>77</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, September 21, 1917.

<sup>78</sup> These nineteen were: Albert L. Friess, George Herberer, Frank Schneider, Robert Etling, Lawrence Fournie, Arthur Kutp, John Wolz, George Williams, AF Heiligenstein, Adolph Wold, Mike Dambacher, Fred Meyer, Albert Kaburek, Clarence Holcomb, Benard Hartman, Herman Joseph, Walter Procasky, Elmer Hexter, and Clarence Vielweber.

chewing gum.<sup>79</sup> After the first few rounds of draftees left the area, a third letter from Phil Schiek arrived in November of 1917. In this letter Schiek talked about how things in France were starting to come together. There were more permanent camps being set up and the men were getting plenty to eat. He expressed how happy he was to hear of the patriotism back home. He also mentioned a woman that had though he had only joined the army to “act smart” and he hoped that she had rethought her position. He also mocks the unnamed woman’s son-in-law for “hiding behind his wife’s skirt” to avoid having to fight in the war. He also talked about there being a reason that the United States was fighting in France and that it was a noble cause. He ended by encouraging the family members of soldiers to mail upbeat messages to the front more often as it made all of the soldiers’ lives better.<sup>80</sup>

Around the same time that Schiek’s letter arrived describing the improvements in France, a letter from Mike Dambacher at Camp Taylor, in Louisville, KY, also arrived. In his letter he told the town that everyone from Freeburg was doing well and that they were adapting to military life. They didn’t have all the luxuries of home, but would be all right. He also mentioned that another Freeburg soldier, George Williams, had been promoted to Sergeant.<sup>81</sup> Hearing that everyone was doing fine in the camps, the town sent a few different groups to Camp Taylor to visit the men. The first group was organized by Warren Hamill, and included people from Freeburg and other surrounding towns. They left in mid-November. The second group visited in mid-December, and was largely made up of girls from the town who wanted to visit their friends and loved ones. The weather was poor at Camp Taylor, and the snow prevented the soldiers from picking them up from the station. This prompted a few of them to stay for a few more days, to make up for the lost time.<sup>82</sup>

Over in France the soldiers from Freeburg continued their fighting, though there was still some time for more creative endeavors. One such example was a poem written by Dewy McBride, titled, “Life of a Private.”

I am sitting here a thinking of the things I left behind;  
and I hate to put on paper. What is running through my mind.  
We’ve dug a million trenches, and cleaned ten miles of ground;  
But a meaner place this side of hill, I know is still unfound;  
But there is one consolation, gather close while I tell;  
When we die we’re bound for heaven, for we’ve done our hitch in hell.  
We’ve build a hundred kitchens for cooks to bake our beans,  
We’ve stood a hundred guard mounts, and cleaned the camps canteens;  
We’ve washed a million mess-kits, and peeled a million Spuds,  
We’ve rolled a million blanket rolls, and washed a million duds;  
The number of parades we’ve made would be very hard to tell,  
But our last parade will be in heaven; For we’ve done our hitch in hell.  
We’ve killed a million bed bugs that tried to take our cots,  
and shook a hundred cock-roaches from out our lousy socks,  
We’ve matched a hundred thousand miles and cleaned a thousand camps,

---

<sup>79</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, September 21, 1917; *Freeburg Tribune*, September 28, 1917; *Freeburg Tribune*, October 5, 1917.

<sup>80</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, November 9, 1917.

<sup>81</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, November 9, 1917.

<sup>82</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, November 16, 1917; *Freeburg Tribune*, December 14, 1917.

we brushed a lot of mud from out our baggy pants,  
But when our war on earth is o'er. Our friends on earth will tell,  
when he died he went to heaven for he did his hitch in hell.<sup>83</sup>

It could be said that some of Freeburg's soldiers were starting to have a more positive outlook on the war. In a letter from Phil Schiek to his friend, Howard Tague, who was back home, Schiek talked about how the war was going well, and that the German soldiers were mostly old men and boys who just wanted to be captured. He also mentioned that he had seen several German planes shot down already.<sup>84</sup> For the rest of the war more men from Freeburg would join the military and leave for camp and then to France to fight. They went to various training camps, including Camp Taylor, Camp Dix, Camp Creek, and Camp Grant. There were some notable individuals from the town that joined the military during this time. One man who voluntarily enlisted for the army was Xavier Heiligenstein. He was past the draft age and had already been exempted from the service, but he signed up to fight anyway. "He had proven his patriotism" was how the *Tribune* put it. Another notable individual was Charles Saxton, the editor of the *Tribune*. He was called to service, yet continued to write pieces and mail them back home to be published. And finally, Dr. Tegtmeier, a highly respect doctor in the area who served on the Board of Health at one point and was also the town mayor, gave up his practice so he could join the war and help fight.<sup>85</sup>

As the war continued for Freeburg, the *Tribune* continued to publish the letters sent by the soldiers in France. Some of them were more lighthearted than others. Good examples were a letter from Leroy Staehle, where he writes about how much he was enjoying army life and traveling, or one from Frank Hillesheim who considered the experience one great adventure. Not all the letters were like that though. In one letter from Stanley Smith, he painted a not unpleasant picture of the war, but at the same time alluded to some of the more serious problems the men were facing, and mentions that their letters were getting censored.<sup>86</sup>

Fortunately for the historian, the *Tribune* published more letters dealing with the gritty and real side of the war than cushioned letters meant to reassure the families back home. In one letter from John Barratt, he discussed how hard military life was. The men did not get enough rest, there was constant hard work, and their guns always had to be on the ready. There were also good depictions of the no-man's land between trenches in letters by Lawrence Sylvester and Nolan Smith. They both described the rotting corpses lying in the sun for days, the stench, and the constant fear of death.<sup>87</sup>

Other letters sent home gave the people of Freeburg an idea of what their friends and family in the trenches were experiencing. In a letter from Lery Staehle, he asked people back home to stop sending tobacco to the soldiers. He explained that if they got gassed, it would spoil. He also talked about how the Allies were taking more territory than ever before. He also discussed how he had found a dead German soldier who looked like he had been praying before he died. He said that he hoped the war would end soon. In another letter, from Frank Hillesheim, he explains how he and the other soldiers never know when they are going to die and that they never hear much

---

<sup>83</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, January 25, 1918.

<sup>84</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, January 25, 1918.

<sup>85</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, February 22, 1918; *Freeburg Tribune*, March 1, 1918; *Freeburg Tribune*, March 22, 1918., *Freeburg Tribune*, April 19, 1918; *Freeburg Tribune*, May 17, 1918; *Freeburg Tribune*, June 21, 1918., *Freeburg Tribune*, June 28, 1918; *Freeburg Tribune*, September 6, 1918; *Freeburg Tribune*, September 13, 1918; *Freeburg Tribune*, July 26, 1918.

<sup>86</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, July 12, 1918; *Freeburg Tribune*, July 26, 1918; *Freeburg Tribune*, August 2, 1918.

<sup>87</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, September 6, 1918; *Freeburg Tribune*, October 4, 1918., *Freeburg Tribune*, October 11, 1918.

news about the overall war. He mentions how horrible the constant shelling is, how bad the gas attacks are, and that the men are only given two meals a day. But not all news was bad, in a letter from Emmett Perrin, he talked about how the Allies were advancing through fields of dead Germans, and that soon the world would be safe again.<sup>88</sup>

In this hellish landscape the men from Freeburg were not immune to harm, and there were many injuries throughout the war. Dewy McBride was shot in the arm, Edwin Koesterer was severely wounded, having his thumb and forefinger on his left hand shot off, as well as a wound in his leg. Fred Kriegeskotte was shot in the left arm, and Herbert Erlinger was the victim of a gas attack.<sup>89</sup> With all these men fighting and sacrificing themselves for the war effort, the people back in Freeburg could not stand idle. Miss Kathy May Blattner signed up to become an overseas Red Cross Nurse, becoming the first woman from Freeburg to do so. Not long after, her example was followed by Miss Margaret Hendrick. The *Tribune* praised their decision to serve the Red Cross by saying, “Next to the soldiers life the nurse’s life is one of the noblest of all occupations.”<sup>90</sup>

While the young people of Freeburg went to France, the town itself continued to have its own interactions with and opinions of the war. One incident involved a man named Ralph Emke. Emke was a man from St. Louis who was well-known in Freeburg. He was arrested under the name of Walter Hempfing on the charge of being a German spy. He had been married for about a month, and it was his wife who told the authorities that she thought her husband was sending information to Germany.<sup>91</sup> Unfortunately, there is no mention of Emke in the *Tribune* after this incident, leaving his final fate, unknown. Surprisingly enough, some Freeburgians had a very realistic view of how hard the war with Germany would be. In an article titled “A Solemn Hour,” published in August 1917, the author observed that soon many more men would be called to leave their homes and that the reality of war would soon set in. There would be loss and sadness for the town and that “the time for make believe and hurrah has passed and the stern terrible reality is upon us.”<sup>92</sup>

In September 1917 there appeared a very informative article of how horrible life in the trenches was. The article came from the account of a French soldier named Jean Picard, who had given a talk at the Jefferson Barracks in St. Louis. The article held nothing back and worked to reinforce the description from Phil Schiek’s early letters about the horrors of the war. The *Tribune*’s editor accompanied the article with a declaration that the *Freeburg Tribune* would not censor itself, and that it would report what it wanted to report, even if the townspeople did not want to hear it. He explained that his goal was not to discourage men from signing up, but also not to paint them a false impression of the war.<sup>93</sup>

Even the average people of Freeburg had some interactions with the war. One notable example was when the *Tribune* asked for all of the people not in the armed forces or the Red Cross to adopt ten principles so that they could ‘do their part’ in helping the US win the war. The points were as follows:

1. Keep themselves well informed on the causes and progress of the World War.
2. Recognize and report internal enemies to the authorities.

---

<sup>88</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, October 25, 1918; *Freeburg Tribune*, November 8, 1918.

<sup>89</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, July 5, 1918; *Freeburg Tribune*, October 4, 1918; *Freeburg Tribune*, October 18, 1918; *Freeburg Tribune*, November 15, 1918; *Freeburg Tribune*, November 29, 1918.

<sup>90</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, August 16, 1918; *Freeburg Tribune*, August 23, 1918.

<sup>91</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, August 17, 1917.

<sup>92</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, August 17, 1917.

<sup>93</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, September 28, 1917.

3. Change eating habits to help conserve wheat, meat, animal fats, dairy products, and sugar.
4. Encourage the increased production of foodstuffs.
5. Buy Liberty Loans.
6. Avoid luxuries whose resources could be used for the war effort.
7. Help stabilize public opinion by not spreading rumors.
8. Be a friend to the families of soldiers.
9. Be calm and patient with the various events of the war.
10. Work harder in their jobs to make up for the loss of manpower.<sup>94</sup>

One unique aspect of the Freeburg area's involvement in the First World War was the formation of one of the first eight aviation training camps in the nearby town of Belleville. Scott Camp was built to house 2,000 servicemen and the people of Freeburg looked forward to watching the daily flying practice. One exciting day for the town was when an airplane from Scott Field landed in town. The townspeople were initially worried that there had been a mechanical failure, or that someone had been injured. Luckily, there was nothing to worry about as the plane had landed there intentionally, and for the next hour people from all over town came to see the plane and the aviators who flew it. While many planes had been seen flying overhead since the construction of the training camp, this was the first to land in town. When the war finally ended Scott Field was not abandoned, and it eventually became Scott Air Force Base.<sup>95</sup>

The townspeople of Freeburg also suffered hardships throughout the war, although not as severe of course as its young soldiers were experiencing in Europe,. One way that the war impacted Freeburg was economically. Early on in the war the price of meat began to soar. The Freeburg Meat Market, on June 1, 1917, stopped accepting credit and only accepted cash transactions. Despite the economic challenges the people of Freeburg were encouraged to continue spending their money to try and to keep the local economy strong and healthy throughout the war.<sup>96</sup> The stress of the war also affected people's lives and sometimes this resulted in real tragedies. One of the worst of these occurred when one of the newly enlisted men, Albert Petri of Fayetteville, murdered his girlfriend, Margaret Pfliffner, and then committed suicide. The two had been together for a time and were planning to get married until a religious misunderstanding ended the relationship. Petri kept trying to call her, but she would not reciprocate his feelings. He eventually went to her house and shot her several times before turning the gun on himself.<sup>97</sup>

Some of the worries in the town were more political. For example, there was a concern that being drawn into the war would cause the United States to slowly become a dictatorship. An article was published to reassure the people of Freeburg, that although the United States would soon undergo a great deal of stress, both social and economic, everything possible would be done by the people of the country to prevent the president from becoming a dictator.<sup>98</sup> One of the biggest concerns that the people of Freeburg had to deal with was a potential food crisis. The *Tribune* actively encouraged the townsfolk to grow food in their personal gardens and to stock up on preserves, so that in the event of a real food crisis, Freeburg would be able to support itself. The fears were not unfounded, as throughout the war the price of wheat rose from \$1.75 to \$2.00, an

---

<sup>94</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, November 30, 1917.

<sup>95</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, June 22, 1917; *Freeburg Tribune*, September 13, 1918; *Freeburg Tribune*, November 15, 1918; *Freeburg Tribune*, November 23, 1917.

<sup>96</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, May 11, 1917.

<sup>97</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, May 18, 1917.

<sup>98</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, June 1, 1917.

incredible increase for that time. By the end of the war food prices had increased by nearly seventy percent.<sup>99</sup> The steady increase in price caused lots of anger being directed toward the “Robber Food Barons” for raising the price on food so much for no other reason than to make a profit. Another problems that the people of Freeburg were angry about were food hoarders. There was an incident, not in Freeburg, where a ‘spud hoarder’ was uncovered by the military and forced to sell his stockpile of food at a fair price. The *Tribune*’s editor reported this occurrence with absolute glee. The idea that anyone would take advantage of the situation was seen as deplorable.<sup>100</sup>

Chris Heilgensten was appointed as the Food Administrator of Freeburg Township to deal with the food concerns. This was regarded as a good decision, and the editor noted that “the food hogs had better hunt their holes.” Initially Heiligenstein was very adamant about enforcing his duties. He put out several notices encouraging anyone who sought to serve food needs to be careful about following any and all regulations, or he would report them to the proper authorities. Heilgenstein eventually resigned his position as the Food Administrator to Theo Krauss. His reason was lack of time to attend to all of his duties.<sup>101</sup>

However, like before, the *Tribune*’s editor was unwilling to allow his readers to have an unrealistic view of the war. He said that the people who claimed that they were suffering “War Hardships” due to meatless or wheat-less days had nothing to complain about. He then discussed some of the deplorable conditions overseas. Specifically the paper trousers being worn by men in Germany, that leather boots were unobtainable, and that shoes were being made out of old ship sails, tents, and burlap. He did not feel like anyone in the area had any right to complain.<sup>102</sup> While conditions may have not been as bad as in Europe, there were still some issues in Freeburg that were indeed worth complaining about, specifically two different diseases that struck the town. The first was a smallpox outbreak in March of 1918, which resulted in seven cases of the illness. The *Tribune* did not release the names of any of the victims.<sup>103</sup>

The second major outbreak was of the Spanish Flu in October of 1918. The town handled it quite well and published many influenza warnings in the *Tribune*, asking people to avoid contact with people with colds, keep their hands clean, and if there is any sign of illness, to go home and call a Doctor. They also asked residents to not use patent medicines, to report cases of suspected influenza, and to burn any cloth that a sick person spit or sneezed into. They also stressed that one in five might die if they contacted it.<sup>104</sup> Despite all the preparations, there were still some fatalities in the township. It is difficult to say how many people died as a result of the flu. The *Tribune* mentions eight individuals that died from the flu, but many more that died of phenomena, which may have been the flu, or a result of the flu.

Despite the war, food issues, and illnesses, the people of Freeburg were able to pull together and perform an astonishing amount of fundraising and charity for the war effort. Even when exempt from the service, the men of Freeburg tried to do their part for the effort. One example was Charles Becker, who was exempt from the draft but was appointed to, and accepted, the position of fundraiser for the district’s Red Cross Fund. Eventually, a Red Cross Society based in Freeburg was formed. R.E. Hammill was elected as the Chairman and F.X. Heiligenstein as the

---

<sup>99</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, June 22, 1917; *Freeburg Tribune*, July 20, 1917; *Freeburg Tribune*, October 11, 1918.

<sup>100</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, December 14, 1917; *Freeburg Tribune*, December 28, 1917.

<sup>101</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, April 4, 1918; *Freeburg Tribune*, April 26, 1918; *Freeburg Tribune*, August 30, 1918.

<sup>102</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, February 22, 1918.

<sup>103</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, March 22, 1918.

<sup>104</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, October 18, 1918; *Freeburg Tribune*, October 25, 1918.



Vice-Chairman. They encouraged every resident of Freeburg to join, charging a yearly membership fee of only one dollar.<sup>105</sup>

The Red Cross held several different events throughout the war. One of which, a Social and Dance raised \$172. The Social included a talk by Professor Oscar Weber from the Belleville Public School system and there was a band from Millstadt providing music for the dance. The Social was a huge success and the Red Cross was able to add to the \$325 that they had already raised.<sup>106</sup> After their first event, the Freeburg Red Cross continued its work. Volunteers made bandages, put on picture shows, asked women to knit sweaters for the soldiers, and threw picnics. The work that the Red Cross received such wide-spread support that the *Tribune* even threatened to publish the name of every resident of Freeburg that did not join or donate to the Red Cross in some way.<sup>107</sup> Even the soldiers overseas were grateful and supported the local Red Cross. In a letter from William Wisnewski, he expressed deep gratitude to the Freeburg Red Cross. Dewy McBride commented on how immensely beneficial the organization was to the boys on the front line. And Pvt. Lewis S. Locklar, while still in training, sent money back through the mail just to donate to the local Red Cross.<sup>108</sup>

Even the *Freeburg Tribune* engaged in charitable actions during the war. The *Tribune* organized a mass gift sending to Camp Taylor for Christmas in 1917. They called for urgency in donating money for presents and gave examples of things to send and not to send. They suggested that people not send perishable goods, wine or other liquors, and that clothing such as neckties would not be needed by soldiers either. What was suggested were pipes, tobacco pouches, wrist watches, fountain pens, pocket books, slippers, knives, mirrors, tobacco, cigarettes, dictionaries, compasses, pencils, playing cards, and hard candy.<sup>109</sup>

Where the people of Freeburg truly shined, however, was in the raising of Liberty Bonds. In the first Liberty Bond drive, Freeburg had a quota to raise \$46,000 in Liberty Bonds. The town raised \$75,000. The First National Bank of Freeburg at this point had sold more Liberty Bonds than any other bank in the district. Local stores even offered discounts to people that bought Liberty Bonds, further encouraging the people of Freeburg to invest in them. In the Third Liberty Loan drive, the quota of \$61,000 was easily surpassed with over \$76,000. Freeburg did so well that it received an Honor Flag for its incredible contributions to the Third Liberty Loan drive.<sup>110</sup> The town of Freeburg made it through the First World War relatively intact. The same could not always be said about some of the young men from Freeburg that went off to war. The first of Freeburg's soldiers to return home with an honorable discharge was Sergeant Isadore Friedreich, soon followed by Mahlon Weber. On the other hand, some of Freeburg's soldiers decided they liked the army. Dewy McBride remained behind in Officers training school, and considered volunteering to stay behind even longer.<sup>111</sup>

Not every man from Freeburg returned home though. Two of the boys from Freeburg never came home. Nolan Smith and Lewis Locklar were the only two fatalities from the town. Nolan Smith was in the same unit as his brother Stanley. Nolan was killed and his brother severely

---

<sup>105</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, June 29, 1917; *Freeburg Tribune*, July 27, 1917.

<sup>106</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, August 24, 1917.

<sup>107</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, February 1, 1918; *Freeburg Tribune*, February 8, 1918; *Freeburg Tribune*, April 26, 1918., *Freeburg Tribune*, July 5, 1918; *Freeburg Tribune*, November 16, 1917.

<sup>108</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, February 22, 1918; *Freeburg Tribune*, May 24, 1918., *Freeburg Tribune*, May 31, 1918.

<sup>109</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, November 23, 1917.

<sup>110</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, November 2, 1917; *Freeburg Tribune*, April 19, 1918; *Freeburg Tribune*, April 26, 1918; *Freeburg Tribune*, June 14, 1918.

<sup>111</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, December 13, 1918.

wounded in the same battle, the day before the war ended. Lewis Locklar died of wounds that he had sustained in battle on November eight. In his last letter home, Locklar asked his mother to not worry about him, and talked about how proud he was of what he was doing.<sup>112</sup> It took until 1921 that Lewis Locklar's remains were returned to the United States, making him the last of Freeburg's fighting men to return home. He and Nolan Smith are now immortalized in Freeburg with the American Legion post being named after them, Locklar-Smith Post No. 550.<sup>113</sup> Today, the St. Clair County World War I monument resides in Freeburg's central park. Engraved on it are the names of all the men that served during the First World War.

---

<sup>112</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, December 6, 1918; *Freeburg Tribune*, December 13, 1918.

<sup>113</sup> *Freeburg Tribune*, March 25, 1921.