

The bulk of Fort Mill veterans were members of the 118th regiment, 30th Division, popularly known as the Old Hickory Division. Thomas Spratt's National Guard unit became part of this regiment at Camp Sevier in Greenville during October 1917. The regiment landed at Calais, France on May 24, 1918.

The first combat action of the 30th Division was when the soldiers faced the German Hindenburg Line on Aug. 31, 1918. For a month they traded shots with the Germans and then on Sept. 29, the Division "plowed its way with shot and shell through that series of German forts, hitherto considered impregnable."

Over the next three weeks, the 30th Division captured 98 German officers and 3,750 enlisted men while three officers and 24 men of the division were taken prisoner. The Americans had 44 officers and 1,011 men killed and 113 officers and 4,823 men wounded.

The worst day of the war for them was Oct. 8, 1918, at Montbrehain, France. They started the day with 185 men and at the end there were only 37 not wounded. Hall, Stevens and Leazer were killed that day. McManus was badly wounded and died later.

Sgt. Thomas Lee Hall, son of Fort Mill's mayor, discovered a German machine gun nest. He was not willing to order his men to their deaths but went alone and killed the five Germans in the gun nest with his bayonet. Later in the day while leading a charge, Hall was mortally wounded.

First Sgt. Willie Nims was wounded in the leg by shell fire. He used a stick as a crutch and led his men with a "remarkable dash and intrepidity through heavy machine gun fire."

In a burst of enthusiasm for the exploits of the Fort Mill boys, postcards were printed to proclaim Fort Mill's contribution to the war. They said: "We claim the prize for patriotism. Can you beat it?"

■ Louise Pettus is a local historian. This monthly article about the history of Fort Mill is presented by the Fort Mill Downtown Association. For details, see www.fortmilldowntown.com.

10B
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Honoring Fort Mill's own heroes



**Fort Mill
History**
By Louise
Pettus

On April 10, 1919, Fort Mill had a lot to celebrate. The small town, hardly more than a village, was marking the return of its World War I veterans.

The servicemen gathered around the old armory. All the town officials were there to greet them.

The small town had furnished 124 men to the U.S. armed forces during the war. And Fort Mill, for a town its size, had more commissioned officers than any other town in the United States. There were a lieutenant colonel, three majors, six captains and five lieutenants.

Out of 96 in the nation, two local soldiers, Lt. James Dozier and Sgt. Thomas Lee Hall, had been awarded the Medal of Honor. Fort Mill also claimed three winners of the Distinguished Service Cross, the next highest honor. The winners were William Nims, Callie Smith and Capt. Elliott White Springs.

After town officials welcomed the troops, there was a response by Lt. Col. Thomas Spratt, who in civilian life had been the cashier of the First National Bank of Fort Mill. Spratt joined the Fort Mill National Guard in 1910. Capt. Sam Parks and Lt. L.B. Dozier made speeches. Then Lt. Frederick Nims, Joseph Belk, Cpl. John Bayne and Dewitt Burrage presented and read the citations to heroes.

Nine memorial wreaths were laid; seven for men killed in action and two for men who died of disease: Sgt. Thomas Lee Hall, Sgt. James E. Bailes, Cpl. Cary L. Faris, Cpl. Harvey L. McManus, Clyde Stevens, Walter O. Leazer, David Lee, Grover Patterson and Eugene Osborne.