

37th DVA Camp Sheridan WWI Memorial Remembered

by Mandy Oberyszyn, 37th DVA Executive Director



The association received an email from **Mark Hilton** in late February 2014. His note simply read, “Are these also memorials to the 37th division while at Camp Sheridan in Montgomery, AL?” It included four pictures, one of an Alabama historical marker honoring the 37th Division and the other three of a monument dedicated on 11 November 1931. I told Mark I’d look into it and thanks to the historical copies of our newsletter, which was known as “The 37th Division A.E.F. News” at that time, I found my answer.

The memorial was erected by the 37th Division Veterans Association and dedicated during the association’s 13th annual reunion, held November 9-11, 1931 in Montgomery, AL. The memorial was part of the planning process for the reunion and was billed as "GOIN TO CAMP" as a majority of members trained at Camp Sheridan 14 years earlier before being deployed in WWI.

Although it is unclear how many people attended that reunion, the association at that time had 6,492 member according to an October 1931 newsletter. The best way to get to Montgomery at that time was by train. Round trip railroad fare published in that same issue from HQS in Columbus, OH, was \$53.78.

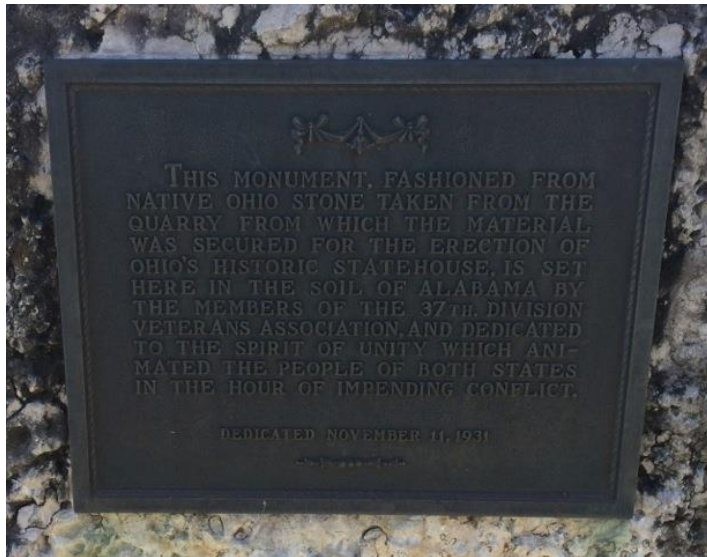
The September 1932 newsletter provides the most coverage on the Camp Shelby Memorial. In an article, written by COL E.P. Lawlor, Chairman Memorial Committee, he writes that...“There was some discussion [at the 37th DVA Executive Committee meeting in the winter of 1931] on the question among which was a statement that the State of Ohio had contributed generously to the memorials of the division in France and Belgium and that it appeared proper and fitting that this one now under discussion might well be erected at the expense of the association itself, the funds to be raised by individual contributions. The cost of a proper and suitable monument was estimated at \$400.00...”

“...The committee held several meetings and agreed that the monument should be something of Ohio production that, when placed at Camp Sheridan, should symbolize the relations of the state of Ohio and Alabama during the war days. To accomplish this it was decided to secure a piece of native limestone from the same quarry from which materials was taken for constructing of the statehouse in Columbus, Ohio, and to place upon it an authentic map of the camp as laid out for occupancy by the troops from Ohio who trained there. The most suitable spot upon which to set this memorial was, in the opinion of the committee, Picket Springs, the site of Division Headquarters...”

A map of Camp Sheridan’s layout was secured from the War Department, which was used to cast a bronze plate to show the locations of regimental and separate units as well as an index to find each location. That tablet is roughly 37” by 28”. Below this map on the vertical face is a bronze seal of the state of Ohio donated for the purpose by the Governor of Ohio George White.



A second tablet measuring 18” by 12” reads as follows: “This monument of Native Ohio limestone, taken from the quarry from which material for the erection of Ohio’s historic Statehouse, is set here in the soil of Alabama by members of the Thirty-Seventh Division Veterans association and dedicated to the spirit of unity which animated the people of both states in the hour of impending conflict.”



Lawlor also writes that, "...One distinctly unique feature of the monument is that there is not a single name inscribed upon it, not even those the members of the Committee." That is a very telling fact about the true goal of the memorial.

Another interesting thing to note, is taken from an October 1931 newsletter in an article written by Hoff L. Greeyce, Ex-Permanent K.P. He starts by saying, "...How disappointed we were, instead of a real camp all we found was a few mess halls, pine trees, plenty of cotton to pull and land to clear. Those first few busy days when nobody knew what to do – when everything you did was wrong."

"Do you remember your first trip to Montgomery? You didn't go over so hot. Well we didn't like that so well, we figured we should have rated high there as we did at home. We didn't stop to consider that they had to get acquainted with our ideas and habits. But it wasn't long till the Ohio militia was adopted by the city and what a home we had..."

Greeyce goes on to later write in that same article that, "...when you arrive in Montgomery you are not going to see a struggling camp rising out of the wilderness and swamps or an uncertain frown on the face of the people. You are going to see the whole town and community standing at the depot, waiting with arms extended just as mother stood when you came home in nineteen [1919]."

Sadly, our collection of historic newsletters has gaps as only three issues covering the 13th reunion and monument dedication were found. One thing is certain as I read those old tomes, Camp Sheridan and the city of Montgomery held special meaning to those men as evidenced by them fund raising to build a memorial and traveling to it during the Great Depression. Little did they know at the time that what they called "The War" would come to be known as WWI with more blood-shed to follow during WWII.

Editor's We thank Mark Hilton for sharing his work with us. One of Mark's hobbies is photographing historical markers and monuments all over central and southern Alabama and Mississippi along with some other states around the country. He then researches them and posts them to web sites including hmdb.org (a historical marker database), waymarking.com and flickr.com. He wanted to see if the organization still existed and I am proud to say it does. Mark lives in Montgomery, AL.