

## William J Kelly



William Kelly or “Bloky” as his friends called him was born on May 28, 1887 in Lakeville, Minnesota to Michael Joseph Kelly (1857-1921) and Bridget E Derham Kelly (1859-1922). His father was a farmer and a painter. William had two twin brothers that also served in WWI, Francis and Walter. William was 30 years old when he registered for the draft on June 5, 1917. He was living in Lakeville and working in the flour mill there. He was drafted and enlisted in Company H, 160<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 40<sup>th</sup> Division. He was sent to Camp Lewis, Washington to train. Camp Lewis was established as the training camp for the 91<sup>st</sup> “Wild West” Infantry Division of the National Army (National Guard) which was comprised of inducted men from at least 14 states. He left for France, from Brooklyn, New York in August of 1918 on the SS Nestor. When he arrived in France, he was reassigned to the 308<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 77<sup>th</sup> Division, Company H. The 308<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment was best known for the experiences of several of its companies, including Company H, which formed part of the “Lost Battalion” after becoming isolated behind German lines in an attack on the Argonne Forest in October 1918. On October 18, 1918 parts of the 40<sup>th</sup> and 77<sup>th</sup> were sent to an undefended gap between the German and American lines that was actually a deep ravine known as the “pocket”. It was located on the edge of the Argonne Forest near the Aisne River in North East France. Considered Impregnable, the Argonne Forest was a natural stronghold. There they were met with stiff resistance. Then they lost their communication link and were trapped. They held their position in the “gap” without food or water for six full days as they continued to fight. With the capture of this key tactical location, the American forces were able to accomplish what the British and French had not been able to do in four years.

He was wounded badly, both in the face and one foot by a shell that had exploded and he is permanently disabled. He spent some time in the hospital in France before he returned home to the United States on March 26, 1919. Records didn’t indicate however he was most likely sent to Fort Columbia, Washington to the base hospital where he was still living in 1920 when the census was completed. In 1930 he is in the Douglas County Workhouse in Parkland, Wisconsin. He was arrested once too many times for public drunkenness. In 1934, William is living as a disabled veteran in the Fort Harrison Veterans Hospital in Montana. He was released on September 17 for a 15-day furlough. He checked into the Bozeman Hotel and met James Deskin and three of his friends. William was found dead on September 20, 1934. He had been shot, close-range through the neck by James Deskin. Deskin was charged and received a life sentence. William is buried in an unmarked grave at the Sunset Hills Cemetery in Bozeman.