

Sgt. George Koonce

Co. F, 47th Infantry, 4th Division

May 6, 1889 - July 21, 1918

George Koonce, who died from the effects of a wound received in action, was born May 6, 1889, at Crossville, White County, Ill. He attended school in that town and later worked on a farm. In Evansville he worked for several years at the Grote Manufacturing Company, and at the Edge Tool Works. On May 11, 1911, at the age of twenty-two, he enlisted in the army for four years and served most of the time in China. When America was about to enter the world war he re-enlisted on February 27, 1917. He had first joined Battery F, expecting to go into training immediately. He did not relish the long delay in calling the battery to service, so he joined Company F, 47th Infantry. For about six weeks he received training at Camp Greene, Charlotte, N.C. Then he was transferred to Camp Mills, N.Y. Two weeks later he sailed for France.

Writing of his experiences in France he said: "I camped right in a beautiful park, but it was so odd. Everything is so old fashioned. I saw more wooden shoes today than I ever saw in my whole life. The buildings are all stone, and the streets look like alleys there at home." Nearly in every letter home he expressed great solicitude for the allotment he made to his parents. In describing the French climate he said, "I don't ever want any one to talk Sunny South to me again. I had, rather be in Alaska right now as to be here."

In a letter home, dated July 17, 1918, Sergeant Koonce said, "I went up to the front on the thirteenth and got my right leg broken just above the knee. It was done by enemy shrapnel." The fatal wound resulted in his death on July 21, 1918.

In a report of his death given in the Evansville Courier his mother is quoted as saying: "Just to think, he has only been gone a few months and now he is dead, away over there and not one of his family with him when he died. I am very proud that he died as he did, and that he was man enough to go. He always wanted to go so bad. He could hardly wait for the train which took him off. On the night that he left he put on the phonograph, 'Send Me Away With a Smile.' "I think I've had my share of trouble, but I am not complaining. I'm very, very proud that he was my son, and I am willing to part with him for our country. But he was such a good boy! He allotted half his pay to me and took out insurance. In the last letter he was worried because we had not received the allotment."

The St. Lucas Soldiers' League sent flowers and the following note of sympathy to the bereaved mother: "God will take care of him. Be not afraid; He is his safeguard, his sunshine and shade. Tenderly watching and keeping his own, He will not leave him to wander alone."*

*This verse appeared in the "Evansville Press"

Source: Blatt, Heiman Kimmel. Sons of Men; Evansville's War Record. Evansville, Indiana: Abe P. Madison, 1920. Internet Archive. <http://www.archive.org/details/sonsofmenevansvi00blat>, 93-94.