

Willow City Veteran Remembers Seeing 'Many A Good Man Die' ^{Nov. 18,} 1978

By LEONARD LUND

WILLOW CITY — On the 60th anniversary of Armistice Day, Nov. 11, Percy Gibbs, 85, a Willow City veteran, could look back on the tragedy of World War I in France where he saw "many a good man die."

Gibbs, who farmed on the Salyer Wildlife Refuge near Upham before that area was taken over by the government, was in the Army for 14 months after being drafted from Lansford. His father, John Gibbs, came from Armstrong, Iowa, to homestead near Lansford. Percy was born Aug. 21, 1893, in Iowa.

After three months of training at Camp Dodge, Iowa, and Fort Riley, Kan., Gibbs was in France as a medic in the 32nd Division, made up largely of men from Michigan and Wisconsin.

He was cooking in an isolation kitchen when he volunteered for field duty at Chateau - Thierry as a replacement for men who were killed.

Of 252 men in the company, only 28 were left after the Argonne Forest fighting and Gibbs was a replacement for those who died.

Gibbs explains that he figured he would never get out of France alive and that he might as well volunteer for front-line duty.

While with the division, he treated the wounded, sometimes without medicine but only with bandages from a first-aid kit.

"We never moved the men. They were taken by carriers to ambulances and then to hospitals," Gibbs recalls.

He says he once worked 36 hours without rest trying to find the wounded.

During the fighting he and other medics would bandage the wounded men in the field.

Medics were detailed to bury the dead on the field after the fighting was over. They would remove one dog tag and leave the other for identification before burial.

When the armistice was signed Nov. 11, 1918, Gibbs was at Meuse-Metz where the gap was being closed as the Americans went around the town.



While Mrs. Gibbs peels potatoes for a meal, Gibbs reminisces about their days on what is now the Salyer Wildlife Refuge.

Gibbs bemoans that many lives would have been saved if the armistice had been signed 10 days earlier.

He recalls that 10,000 Americans were prisoners of the Germans in Metz and the Allies didn't want to fire on the town for fear of killing them.

On returning from the service, Gibbs married Carrie Fred, whose father, Carl Fred, lived on what is now the refuge.

Three sons of the Gibbses followed their father into service.

Chester and Morris saw combat during World War II and Earl was a sailor during the Korean war.

Morris was assigned to harbor craft by the Army and Morris was in Belgium.

Cecil, the oldest, was drafted but rejected after failing his physical.

Morris now works with a railroad section crew at

Willow City. Chester farms at Fillmore, Earl is employed by Allis-Chalmers in Gurnee, Ill., and does first aid work and Cecil has a job at Minot Air Force Base.

Daughters of the Gibbses are Lois, Mrs. Robert Forrest

of Riverdale; Crystal, Mrs. Lee Dolbeare of Willow City;

Pauline, Mrs. Schoenborn in

Towner, and Jean, 40, an invalid at home. There are 27 grandchildren.

Married in 1920, the Gibbses farmed at Lansford for eight years before moving to what is now the refuge.