

Leonard Ernest Conley

Private, US Army

A Short Biography of the Namesake of
Gretna American Legion Post 216



Private Leonard E. Conley, U.S. Army, circa 1918

Forward

The following is a short biography recounting the life of Private Leonard Ernest Conley, namesake of the Gretna American Legion Leonard Conley Post 216.

Leonard Conley was born on November 28, 1892, in Oquawka, Illinois. His family moved to Omaha when he was very young, settling in Ward 1, South Omaha City.

He registered for the Selective Service of the U.S. Army on June 5, 1917 from Melia Precinct, Sarpy County, Nebraska at the age of 25. At the time, he was employed as a farm hand on his grandmother's farm (Maria L. Adkins) south of Gretna, Nebraska.

Private Leonard Conley served in Company C, 128th Infantry Regiment, 64th Brigade, 32nd Infantry Division. He was wounded in action on August 1, 1918¹ during the Aisne-Marne Campaign (Château-Thierry). He returned to duty on September 20th, and was killed in action during an attack on the Kriemhilde Stellung portion of the German Hindenburg Line, near Romagne, France on October 17, 1918 during the Meuse-Argonne Campaign.²

His body was returned to Omaha after the war, and was laid to rest on October 16, 1921 in West Lawn Cemetery, now today as Westlawn-Hillcrest Memorial Park Cemetery, in Legion Circle, Section 24, near his parents, three siblings, and his grandmother.

First published December 7, 2016

Updated on July 23, 2017

¹ The Lincoln Star, October 18, 1921, page 7.

² U.S. Army Adjutant General Military Records, 1631-1976, Report for 1919-1920, page 70.

Section 1: Leonard's Family and Early Years

Leonard Conley was born on November 28, 1892, in Oquawka, Henderson County, Illinois to Viret Everett Conley and Mary "Mollie" Ett (Adkins) Conley. He had two brothers, Sheldon and Viret, Jr., and three sisters, Stella, Ella, and Florence. He and Sheldon were born in Illinois. All of his other siblings were born in South Omaha. A short overview of his family:

- Viret Everett Conley (Apr 1863 – 1940)
- Mary Ett (Adkins) Conley (Sep 1864 – 1945) [Married 26 June 1887]
 - Stella Algeo Conley (28 Oct 1888 – May 1982)
 - Sheldon Wesley Conley (31 Aug 1889 – 20 Aug 1951)
 - Leonard Ernest Conley (28 Nov 1892 – 17 Oct 1918)
 - Viret Everett Conley, Jr. (Feb 1895 – 28 Jan 1937)
 - Ella Laura Conley (Jan 1897 - 1949)
 - Florence A. Conley Hinchcliff (15 Jan 1899 – Jun 1979)

His father Viret hailed from Indiana. Not much information is available for Viret except that according to the 1900 Census, both of his parents were also born in Indiana.³

His mother, Mary Ett Adkins (also known as Mollie), was born near West Point, Cuming County, Nebraska to Piatte Adkins and Maria L. Algeo. Piatte hailed from Indiana, while Maria was born in Ireland. Mary's father passed away some time before 1876 and her mother Maria remarried in 1876 to Tilghman Overton, a farmer from Forest City Precinct in Sarpy County, just south of present day Gretna. Mary and her siblings moved to the Overton farm, which was located in Section 23 of Forest City one mile east of where the Holy Family Shrine is currently located, just west of the intersection of Highway 31 and Pflug Road. Maria's second husband eventually left, and the 80 acre farm shows up on the 1889 plat map as belonging to Ms. Overton, with the 1920 Plat Map showing it as being owned by Maria Adkins, her maiden name. A wider view of the area is provided on page 4.



1889 (L) and 1920 (R) Plat Maps, Forest City Township, Sarpy County, Nebraska

³ 1900 United States Federal Census, South Omaha, Ward 1, Nebraska, District 137

A Short Biography of Private Leonard E. Conley

Viret Everett Conley and Mary Ett Adkins were married June 26, 1887 in Omaha. They resided in Omaha, with the exception of a short period in Illinois, where Sheldon and Leonard were born. In 1900, they resided at 821 North 18th Street in what was then known as South Omaha City. South Omaha was a separate municipality until it was officially absorbed by the much larger Omaha in 1915.⁴ South Omaha City was divided north and south by Q Street according to the 1913 map of the greater Omaha area.⁵ That would place their residence on present day South 18th Street between I and J streets. Possible matches are 4417 or 4421 S 18th Street, built in 1896.

TWELFTH CENSUS OF THE UNITED STATES.

SCHEDULE No. 1.—POPULATION.

State Nebraska
 County Douglas
 Township or other division of county South Omaha city Name of Institution, X
 Name of incorporated city, town, or village, within the above-named division, South Omaha City
 Enumerated by me on the 14 day of June, 1900, Jennie J. Robertson

LOCATION.			NAME of each person whose place of abode on June 1, 1900, was in this family. Enter surname first, then the given name and middle initial, if any. Exclude every person living on June 1, 1900. Over children born since June 1, 1900.	RELATION. Relationship of each person to the head of the family.	PERSONAL DESCRIPTION.		NATIVITY.					CITIZENSHIP.						
IN CITIES.	IN VILLAGES.	IN RURAL DISTRICTS.			DATE OF BIRTH.	SEX.	Place of birth of each person and parents of each person enumerated. If born in the United States, give the State or Territory; if of foreign birth, give the Country only.	Place of birth of this Person.	Place of birth of Father of this person.	Place of birth of Mother of this person.	Year of immigration to the United States.	Number of years in the United States.	Naturalization.					
Street.	House Number.	Number of families in the entire city or village.	Number of families, in the street of this family.	Color or race.	Sex.	Month.	Year.	Age at last birthday.	Whether deaf, blind, idiotic, insane, or otherwise, as shown on the certificate.	Number of years married.	Number of live many.	Number of times married.	13.	14.	15.	16.	17.	18.

1900 Census, South Omaha City, Ward 1

The family moved to 1023 North 20th Street by the 1910 census. The current address changed to 4211 South 20th Street according to the 1920 census. It no longer stands, as it stood on the present every site of Spring Lake School. Leonard was 18 years old in 1910, listed as a "Farm Laborer", as he worked on his grandmother's farm south of Gretna.

33	1023 44	67	Conley	Viret	Head	M	W	40	M	24	English	Roseman	Round House	W
34				Mary	Wife	F	W	44	M	24	English	none		
35				Stella	Daughter	F	W	22	S		English	air Librarian	Library	W
36				Sheldon	Son	M	W	26	S		English	Deputy Postman	Federal Bldg	W
37				Leonard	Son	M	W	18	S		English	Laborer	Farm	W
38				Viret Jr.	Son	M	W	16	S		English	Presswork	Factory	W
39				Ella Laura	Daughter	F	W	14	S		English	none		W
40				Blossie	Daughter	F	W	11	S		English	none		
41	2017 58	52	Conside	John	Head	M	W	34	M	8	English	Roseman	Packing House	W
42				Mary	Wife	F	W	27	M	8	English	none		

1910 Census, South Omaha, Ward 1

⁴ Encyclopedia of the Great Plains, David J. Wishart, 2004, pg 177.

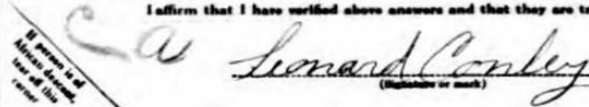
⁵ Douglas - Sarpy - Washington Counties 1913, Nebraska, Bee Publishing, 1913.



A Short Biography of Private Leonard E. Conley

The U.S Congress passed the Selective Service Act on May 18, 1917. Six weeks later, the United States formally entered the First World War. We know that Sheldon was called up and served in the war, we just don't know in what unit he served, or the timeframe that he served either overseas in the war, or stateside in training or in post-war service. We do know, however, that he resided in the U.S. National Homes for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers in Leavenworth, KS from 1931 until at least 1942 before passing on August 20, 1951 at the Fall River Veterans Home in Fall River, South Dakota.

Leonard and his brothers, Sheldon Wesley and Viret Everett, Jr., all signed their Selective Service Registration Cards on June 5, 1917. Leonard signed his card in Melia Precinct, Sarpy County. Melia was a small town located within Forest City Township, just south of Gretna. He listed his address as Gretna, Nebraska, and his employer as M.L. Adkins, who was his grandmother, Maria L. Adkins. He was likely living on the farm with his grandmother and uncle, Luther Adkins, who took over operation of the farm.

Sheldon and Viret, Jr. each signed their registration cards in Omaha, both listed their address as 4211 South 20th Street. This is the same home that the family moved to prior to the 1910 Census. The address changed with the annexation of South Omaha City into Omaha as discussed above. Sheldon was employed by Swift and Company, owner of the Omaha Stockyards and meat packing company at the time. Viret was a Fort automobile mechanic.

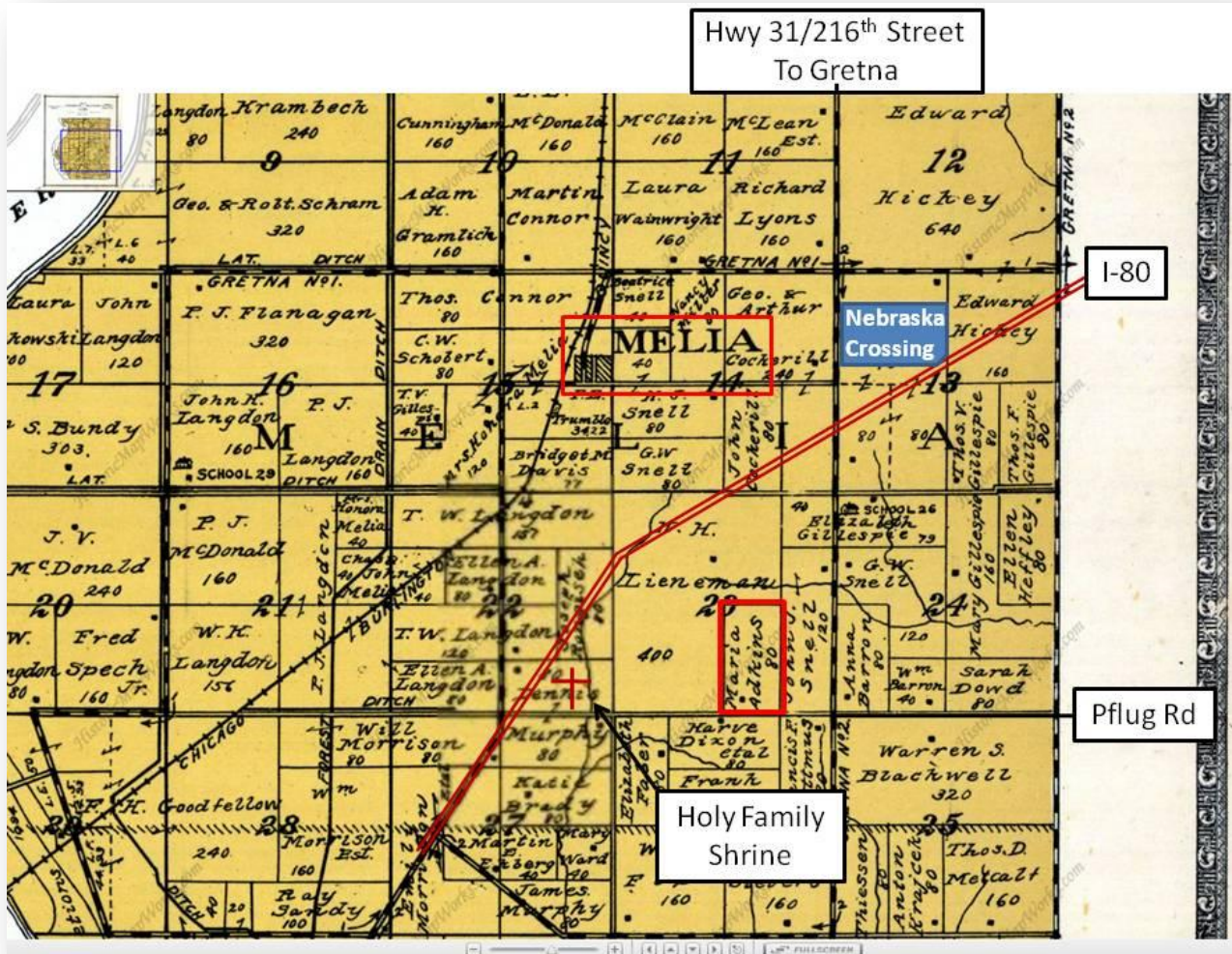
Form 1 REGISTRATION CARD		No. 33
1	Name in full <i>Leonard Conley</i> <small>(Given name) (Family name)</small>	Age in yrs. <i>25</i>
2	Home address <i>Gretna Neb</i> <small>(No.) (Street) (Town)</small>	
3	Date of birth <i>Nov 28 1892</i> <small>(Month) (Day) (Year)</small>	
4	Are you (1) a natural-born citizen, (2) a naturalized citizen, (3) an alien, (4) or have you declared your intention (specify which)? <i>natural born</i>	
5	Where were you born? <i>aquawilla ill. U.S.A</i> <small>(Town) (State) (Nation)</small>	
6	If not a citizen, of what country are you a citizen or subject?	
7	What is your present trade, occupation, or office? <i>farmer</i>	
8	By whom employed? <i>M. L. Adkins</i> Where employed? <i>Gretna Neb</i>	
9	Have you a father, mother, wife, child under 12, or a sister or brother under 12, solely dependent on you for support (specify which)? <i>no</i>	
10	Married or single (which)? <i>single</i> Race (specify which)? <i>caucasian</i>	
11	What military service have you had? Rank <i>none</i> ; branch ; years ; Nation or State	
12	Do you claim exemption from draft (specify grounds)?	
I affirm that I have verified above answers and that they are true.		
 <small>(Signature or mark)</small>		

REGISTRAR'S REPORT		No. 261 51-A
1	Tall, medium, or short (specify which)? <i>Medium</i> Slender, medium, or stout (which)? <i>medium</i>	
2	Color of eyes: <i>Blue</i> Color of hair: <i>dark</i> Bald: <i>no</i>	
3	Has person lost arm, leg, hand, foot, or both eyes, or is he otherwise disabled (specify)? <i>no</i>	
I certify that my answers are true, that the person registered has read his own answers, that I have witnessed his signature, and that all of his answers of which I have knowledge are true, except as follows:		
 <small>(Signature of registrar)</small>		
Precinct <i>melia</i>		
City or County <i>Sarpy</i>		
State <i>nebr</i>		
 <small>(Date of registration)</small>		

Leonard Conley's Selective Service Registration Card, dated June 5, 1917

A Short Biography of Private Leonard E. Conley

A wider view of the 1920 plat map shows the Adkins farm and the small town of Melia, which is no longer in existence, in relationship to present day landmarks. The Adkins farm is located three miles south of Gretna, just one mile south of Interstate 80. The Holy Family Shrine is one mile west of the farm location.



1920 Plat Map with Addition of Present Day References Added

Section 2: Private Leonard E. Conley in World War 1

PVT Leonard Conley served in Company C, 128th Infantry Regiment, 64th Brigade, 32nd Infantry Division. The United States 32nd Infantry Division was formed from Army National Guard units from Wisconsin and Michigan and fought primarily during World War I and World War II. With roots as the Iron Brigade in the American Civil War, the division's ancestral units came to be referred to as the Iron Jaw Division. During tough combat in France in World War I, it soon acquired from the French the nickname *Les Terribles* (The Terrible Ones) referring to its fortitude in advancing over terrain others could not.⁶ It was the first allied division to pierce the German Hindenburg Line of defense,⁷ and the 32nd then adopted its shoulder patch; a line shot through with a red arrow, to signify its tenacity in piercing the enemy line. It then became known as the *Red Arrow Division*.⁸

Leonard Conley was the only “Gretna Boy” killed in action in France, and one of the first drafted from Sarpy County. He received his training at Camp Funston, located at Fort Riley, Kansas. He went overseas as part of a replacement company in April 1918, and was later assigned to the 32d Division. He was severely wounded in action on 1 August 1918 and confined to the hospital.⁹

This was during the Aisne-Marne Campaign, also known as the Second Battle of the Marne, or Chateau-Thierry. On 26 July 1918 the 32nd Division proceeded to the region of Château-Thierry, as part of the 38th French Corps, 6th French Army, in the tip of the famous Marne salient. After nightfall on 29 July, the 64th Brigade (127th and 128th Infantry) began to filter forward to relieve the 3rd Infantry Division in the front line, on the Ourcq in the vicinity of Ronchères. The 3rd Division had been fighting continuously since the German offensive started about 15 July and was exhausted while attempting to overcome strong German resistance in the Bois de Grimpettes.¹⁰

On the morning of 31 July, both Infantry Brigades of the 32nd Division went into action side by side. Directly in front of us was the long, open slope of the Ourcq Valley, reaching to the woods of Les Jomblettes on Hill 212, a spur of Hill 230. This objective constituted one of the strongest German positions on the line of the Ourcq, and the success of the contemplated operation meant the breaking of the Kaiser’s last formidable line of resistance south of the Vesle. Les Jomblettes was not only holding up the 32D Division, machine gun nests there and in the Bois Pelger, further back, flanked the open ground in front of the 42nd Division and absolutely prevented any advance by the “Rainbows”. On the left, the 63nd Brigade promptly reached its objective, Hill 212, after some wicked fighting. They dove into Les Jomblettes and mopped it up and then cleaned out the Bois Pelger,

⁶ The 32nd Division in World War I: From the "Iron Jaw Division" to "Les Terribles". The 32nd 'Red Arrow' Veteran Association. Archived from the original on 25 February 2009.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Hubbuch, Chris (11 November 2008). "Remembering Wisconsin's citizen soldiers". La Crosse Tribune.

⁹ The Lincoln Star, Tuesday, October 18, 1921, page 7.

¹⁰ The 32nd Division in World War I: From the "Iron Jaw Division" to "Les Terribles"

allowing the 42nd Division to advance. On the right, the 127th Infantry pushed their attack through the village of Cierges and passed beyond, only to be held up by a withering hail of machine gun bullets from Bellevue Farm, which had been organized into a very strong center of resistance which the artillery had failed to smother. The attack was renewed on the morning of 1 August 1918, the day he was wounded. The mission of the 64th was to take Bellevue Farm, which had stopped the attack the day before. The Germans resisted desperately and were amply supported by machine guns and artillery. But “Les Terribles” were not to be denied. The objectives were gained and after dark the 32nd Division dominated Hill 230. The Germans were forced to retreat after they lost this commanding high ground.¹¹

His name first appeared in many newspapers reported as “Wounded Severely” in action on or before 10 September 1918.¹² The lateness in the reporting of his injuries may have been due to the sheer volume of soldiers killed and injured, coupled with the fact that the Army simply had no means to report on a daily or even weekly basis to the media outlets of the day.



The Capital Times, Madison, Wisconsin; Tuesday, September 10, 1918.

Private Conley returned to duty on 20 September 1918.¹³ The Meuse-Argonne Offensive started on 26 September 1918. The 32nd Division was sent forward to occupy the original front of the Fifth Corps, which that morning had gone over the top and attacked the

¹¹ Ibid

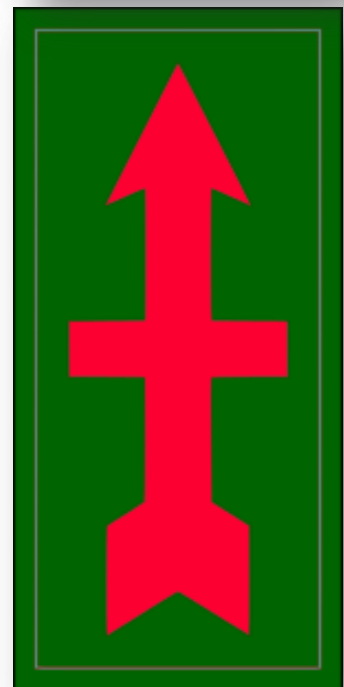
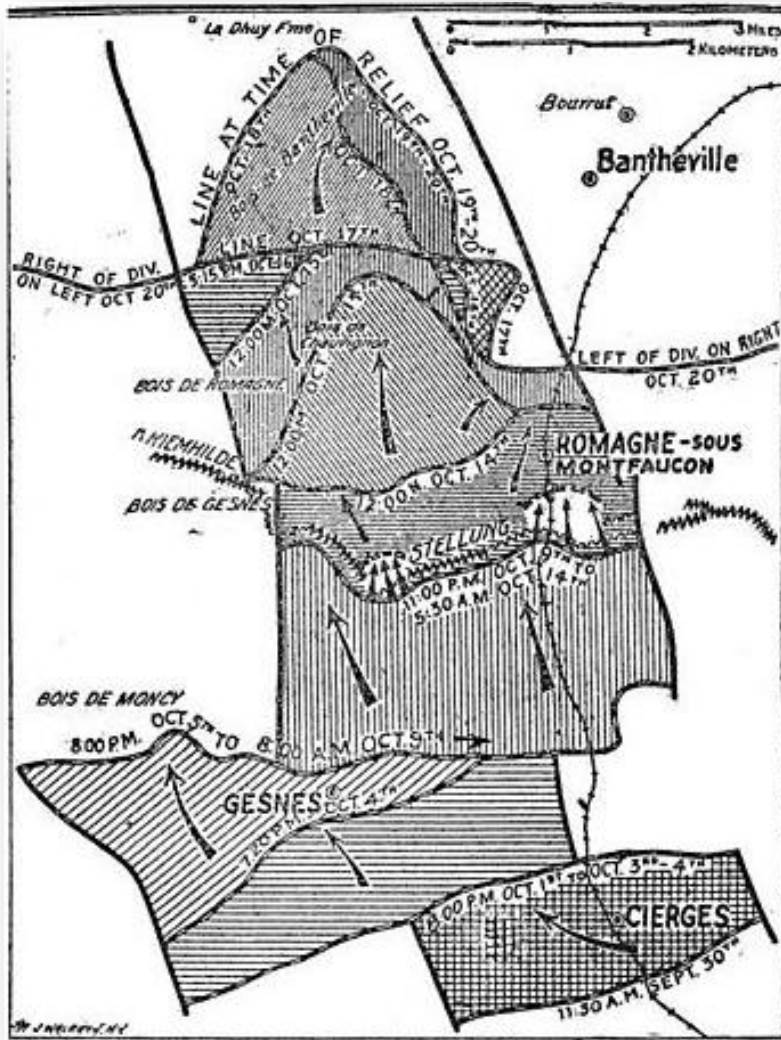
¹² The Capital Times, Madison, Wisconsin, Tuesday, September 10, 1918, page 3.

¹³ The Lincoln Star, Tuesday, October 18, 1921, page 7.

A Short Biography of Private Leonard E. Conley

enemy in the Argonne. As the attack progressed, the 32nd followed in support of the three divisions of the Corps that were in the front line, ready to relieve any one of them when needed. On the cold and rainy night of 29 September, the order was received to go forward and relieve the 37th Division (Ohio). The Division made a difficult move, 11 miles, on foot through the cold, dark, rainy night, over ground strewn with deep shell holes, broken barbed wire and broken trees and brush, with 78 pound packs on their backs.¹⁴ The relief was complete on 30 September.

The 128th Infantry Regiment spent most of the early days of the offensive following in support of the 127th Regiment until October 4th. During the attack on 5 October, the 127th Infantry was relieved in the front line by the 128th, and on the night of 5-6 October, the 126th Infantry was relieved by the 125th.¹⁵



Top: Map of 32nd Division attack on the Hindenburg Line.
Right: 128th Infantry Regiment (top), 32nd Division (bottom)

¹⁴ The Capital Times, Madison, Wisconsin, Tuesday, September 10, 1918. Page 3.

¹⁵ Ibid.

A Short Biography of Private Leonard E. Conley

On the morning of 8 October, the new front line was about two kilometers north of Gesnes. The 32nd Division was now directly in front of the Kriemhilde Stellung, known as the strongest position on the whole Hindenburg Line in the Meuse-Argonne sector. The general plan was to penetrate the wire and works at some point south of Romagne and then to roll up the remainder of the position by a movement to the left, taking the heights from the rear. The remainder of 8 October was devoted to positioning the soldiers of the 32nd Division for the attack. The attack began at 0530 hours on 14 October 1918. Action for the 32nd Division continued until late in the afternoon of 19 October, when the 32nd Division was relieved by the 89th Division.¹⁶

Private Leonard E. Conley was killed in action on 17 October 1918 during one of the attacks to defeat the German defenses of the Hindenburg Line near Romagne, France.^{17 18}

70 REPORT OF THE ADJUTANT GENERAL

Name	Serial No.	Rank	Organization at Time of Death	Date of Death
Butler, Homer J.	2,196,553	Pvt IcI	Med De 354 Inf	Sept. 10-18
Cain, Henry Earl	2,845,917	Pvt IcI	Co G 355 Inf	Sept. 15-18
Carlson, Erik Martin	2,180,508	Pvt IcI	Co B 341 Mg Bn	Oct. 21-18
Carter, Leora	2,847,952	Pvt	Co K 320 Inf	Sept. 12-18
Cassel, Gunnar K.	1,113,362	Pvt	Co C 9 F Sig Bn	Nov. 10-18
Capelle, Atlee E.	240,911	Pvt	Co C 103 Inf	July 20-18
Christenson, Otto H.	2,181,964	Pvt	Co M 355 Inf	Oct. 21-18
Cone, William A.	2,185,611	Pvt IcI	Sn Det 356 Inf	Nov. 10-18
Conley, Leonard	2,181,379	Pvt	Co C 128 Inf	Oct. 17-18
Cook, Lester C.	2,213,859	Corp	Co I 4 Inf	July 23-18
Cooksley, Frank	240,826	Pvt	Co E 28 Inf	July 19-18

Biennial Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Nebraska, 1919-1920

ROLL OF HONOR

NAME	RANK	ORGANIZATION	CAUSE	DATE	ADDRESS—NEXT OF KIN
Conley, Earl J.	Pvt. 1cl.	Bat. A. 120 F. A.	KIA	8/6/18	Apollonia, Wis. Peter Conley.
Conley, John P.	Pvt.	Co. F. 126 Inf.	KIA	10/9/18	Levi, West Va.
Conley, Leonard	Pvt.	Co. C. 128 Inf.	KIA	10/17/18	Mr. James Lewis Conley. 4211 S. 20th St., Omaha, Neb.
Conlin, Edward	Pvt.	Co. H. 125 Inf.	KIA	10/14/18	Mr. Viret E. Conley.

The 32nd Division in the World War, 1917-1919

¹⁶ Ibid.

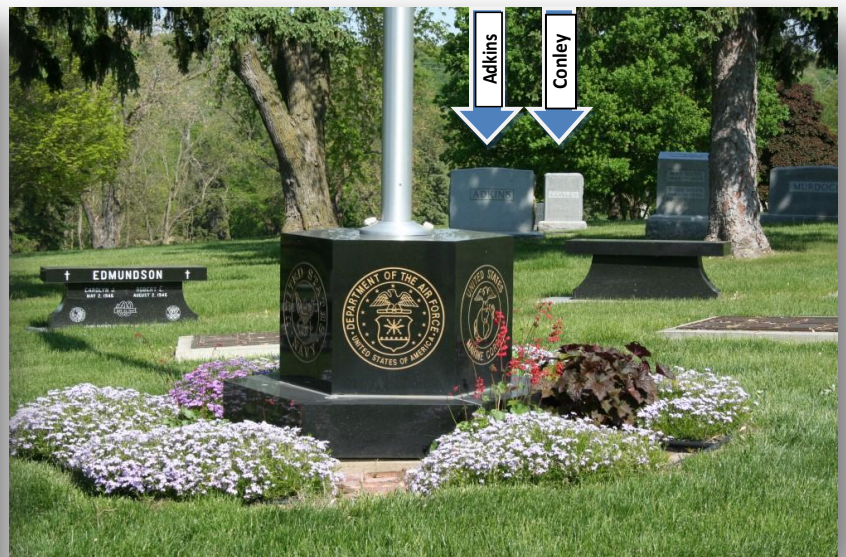
¹⁷ Biennial Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Nebraska, 1919-1920. Page 70

¹⁸ The 32nd Division in the World War, 1917-1919

Section 3: Coming Home

The remains of Private Leonard Conley were returned to Omaha after the war. He was laid to rest on 16 October 1921, nearly three years to the day after his death, in West Lawn Cemetery in Omaha, known today as Westlawn-Hillcrest Memorial Park Cemetery.¹⁹ He rests in Section 24, American Legion Circle, Lot 178, Space 5. He is buried between his parents, Viret Everett Conley and Mary “Mollie” Ett (Adkins) Conley. His burial space is located directly to the east of his grandmother, Maria Algeo Adkins, buried in Section 145.

American Legion Circle is located in the center of the cemetery, as depicted in the map below (lower half of the cemetery is not shown). Lot 178 is located on the eastern edge of the circle. To find his grave, you approach the flag pole in the center of American Legion Circle from the west. You will see the Adkins family stone directly east of the flag pole, with the Conley family stone just behind it. The two family stones are visible behind the base of the flagpole in the photo below.



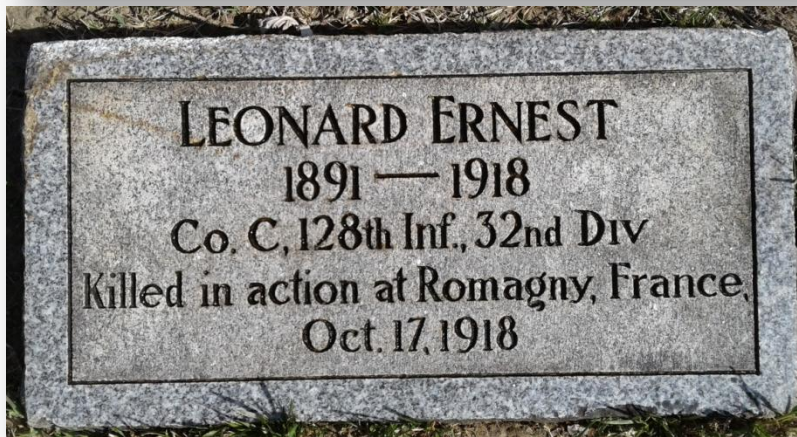
Above: View of the Adkins and Conley family stones located directly east of the American Legion Circle flag pole. Left: Map showing the location of American Legion Circle.

The following page includes detailed photos of his grave site. His headstone is directly behind the Adkins family stone, between the Adkins and Conley family stones. The base of the Adkins family stone is visible in the lower left of the photo on the following page. Leonard’s headstone is identified by the arrow. An American Legion medallion is positioned on the opposite side of the Conley family stone from his headstone, as shown in the photo at lower right.

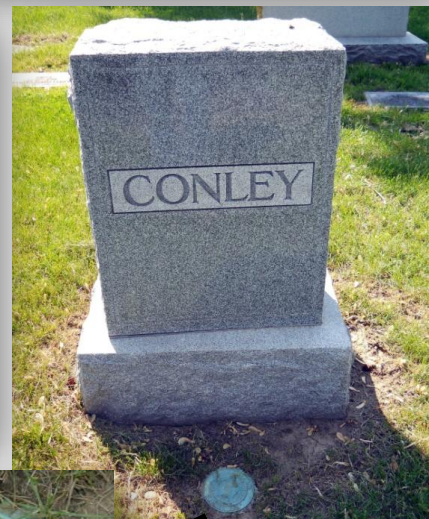
¹⁹ Lincoln Star, Tuesday, October 18, 1921. Page 7.

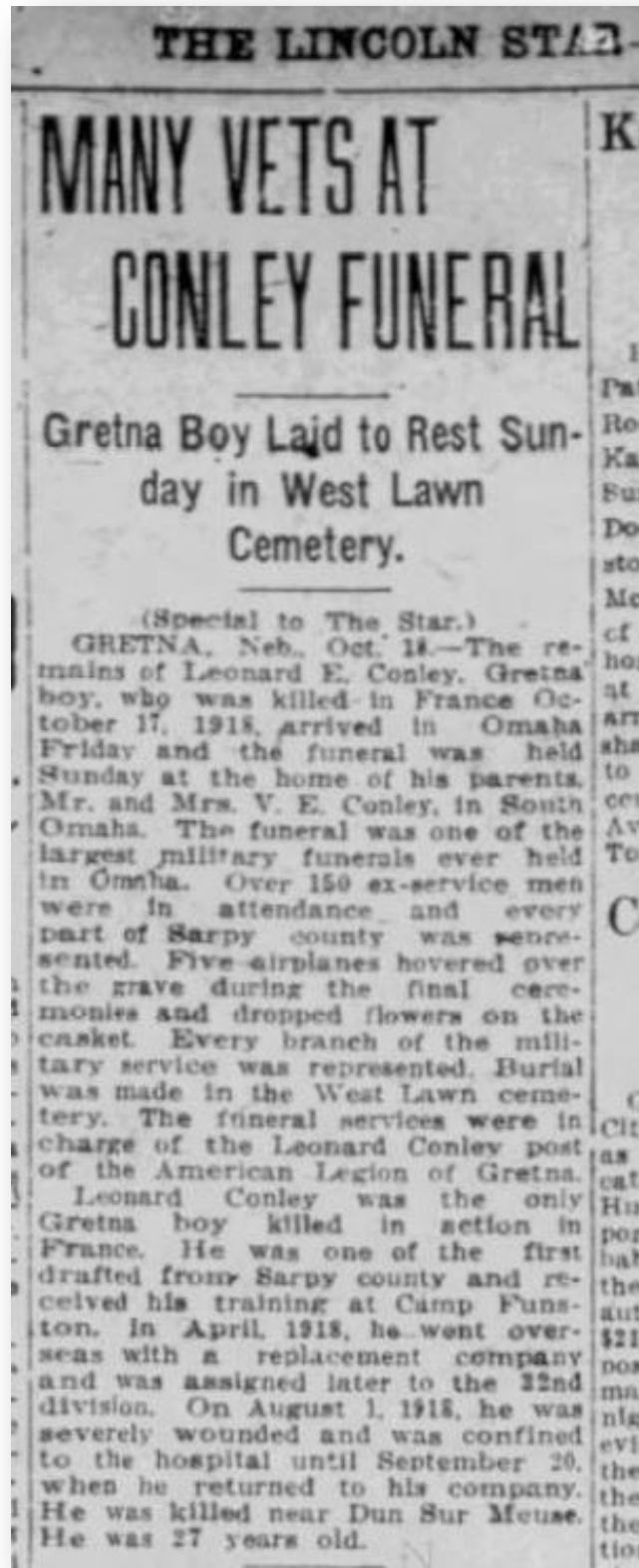
A Short Biography of Private Leonard E. Conley

The Gretna American Legion Post 216 was chartered on 28 February 1920. It was shortly later named Gretna American Legion, Leonard E. Conley Post 216.



Headstone cleaned in March 2017





Article from the Lincoln Star, published on Tuesday, October 18, 1921.

Research and photos by Jeff Jones
Vice Commander, Leonard Conley Post 216
December 7, 2016 -- updated July 23, 2017