

FAMILY TO HONOR BELOIT HEROES WHO DIED 100 YEARS AGO IN WWI

July 19, 2018 at 9:26 am | By [Hillary Gavan](mailto:hgavan@beloitdailynews.com) (mailto:hgavan@beloitdailynews.com)



Hillary Gavan/Beloit Daily News Tim McKearn and his cousin Mary Ellen McKearn Fuentes gather by the grave of Corporal and World War I hero Joe McKearn and Joe's mother Mary McKearn. The McKearn family will be honoring Joe McKearn and other Beloiters killed on Aug. 4, 1918 in World War I on Aug. 4 at Calvary Cemetery.

BELOIT - "I mean, they say you die twice. One time when you stop breathing and a second time, a bit later on, when somebody says your name for the last time."

That quote from Banksy, an anonymous England-based graffiti artist, describes how Beloiters Tim McKearn said he feels when he thinks about his grandfather's brother who died in World War I.

Tim McKearn, his cousin Col. Mark McKearn (retired) and their extended families will be honoring World War I hero Joe McKearn along with at least six other Beloiters from the same company who were killed on Aug. 4 a hundred years ago.

"By honoring those who served, we honor our past and reflect on the impact they had on our future," Col. Mark McKearn said.

"Whenever you can raise up stories about family members you are keeping them alive longer," Tim McKearn said.

Beloit has a long proud history of service in World War I. Three Beloiters received the Distinguished Service Cross, the nation's second highest military honor including Ray Dickop who was killed on Aug. 4. Black Jack Pershing called Dickop one of the 15 greatest heroes of World War I, according to documents compiled by the late Tom McKearn, who was Tim McKearn's uncle.

Wilfred Lloyd, Dickop's orderly, received the Distinguished Service Cross, and James Hix received it for conduct occurring on July 30, 1918.

The Gerald family of Beloit lost a son Aug. 4, in addition to a son lost earlier and another one wounded.

The McKearns will gather on Aug. 4 at Joe McKearn's grave site at Calvary Cemetery at 10:30 a.m. The McKearns will have an opening prayer for all those Beloiters who died in World War I. They will speak about the U.S. involvement in World War I and spend some time in reflection on service and the meaning of Memorial Day, Veterans Day and Independence Day. Frank McKearn IV, an accomplished trumpet player, will play taps.

On April 6, 1917 America declared war on Germany, three years after hostilities had begun, and on July 7, 1917 Joe McKearn joined Company L, 127th Infantry Regiment, of the National Guard's 32nd Division. On Jan. 31, 1918 the Red Arrow Division boarded ship at Hoboken, New Jersey and sailed for France.

Joe McKearn and the other heroes were part of the American Expeditionary Forces which fought against Germans during the Aisne/Marne offensive, the Germans final attempt to get Paris and win the war. Men from Company L were soldiers from Beloit and Rhinelander who fought in the Aisne/Marne offensive.

In June of 1918, the German offensive stalled 30 miles from Paris. In July of 1918 the 32nd Division along with other American and French forces initiated a counter-offensive to retake the land lost during the German attack. The mission of the 32nd Division was to advance to and secure the French town of Fismes, said Col. Mark McKearn.

Led by Lt. Ray Dickop, the men of Company L attacked the fortified German machine gun positions in Fismes. Corporal Joe McKearn was gunned down by a German machine gun as he charged the wall at Chezelles farm. Lt. Dickop, also fatally wounded, received the Distinguished Service Cross for his heroic actions leading the attack.

During the counter-attack, between July 30 and Aug. 4, 1918, the 32nd Division had 578 men killed in action. The men of the 32nd were named Les Terribles by a French General for their courageous actions during those six days.

On June 11, 1921, Corporal Joe McKearn was laid to rest at Calvary Cemetery with many of his former L Company comrades in attendance.

Two of Joe McKearn's brothers also saw action in World War I. Bill McKearn was in the 7th Division and Tom McKearn served as a machine gunner with the 33rd Illinois National Guard Division. They were both gassed and each was awarded the Purple Heart medal. Col. Mark McKearn said he hopes the upcoming event will encourage others to reflect on the many blessings that come with freedom.

"What have you done to give back to the community in service?" he asked.

The McKearns continue to have strong military presence with seven McKearns on active duty.