

BRINGING TO LIFE THE GRANDFATHER I NEVER KNEW

A personal essay by Valerie J. Young, February 2017

My grandfather, Chester Allen Bower, served as a Private in the U.S. Army's 79th Division, which took part in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive from September to November 1918. This Offensive was the largest military operation ever undertaken by the U.S. Army at that time and its success led, in part, to the end of the Great War. The 79th Division participated in the first phase of the Offensive at Montfaucon at the end of September 1918, and then took part in the third and final phase of the Offensive east of the Meuse River from the end of October to the Armistice on November 11.

My grandfather was not wounded in the war, but he reported being gassed very close to the Armistice, around November 3. This gassing was thought to have contributed to long-term health issues over the 20 years after he returned home. Chester was born in August 1894 in New Oxford, Pennsylvania and died near there in Hanover at age 45 on December 30, 1939. He was my mother's father, and she was just 12 years old when he died.

Growing up, my siblings and I learned the story of Chester being gassed in the war and dying young, but we knew more about our grandmother and her side of the family than we did the Bower side. My mother left Pennsylvania in 1948 when she was 21. She graduated from University of Pennsylvania Nursing School that year, and followed her older sister west to California, where she met my father, a 3rd generation Californian from the San Francisco Bay Area. She raised her family and remained there the rest of her life.

My mother passed away in 2013 at age 85 and my father in early 2016 at age 92. When we cleared out and sold our family home of 56 years, we discovered some old boxes of my mother's that had not been opened in a very long time. My summer of 2016 was spent unexpectedly captivated by the old family photographs and treasures from my mother's childhood, especially those related to her father who had died when she was young.

I did not recall ever having seen a picture of my grandfather, and it took some time to figure out who all the unfamiliar faces were in these photographs. There were some photographs of Chester in uniform, one with his older brother Willis who was too old to enlist in the first WWI draft, and one with his younger brother Charles (known as Charlie) who was too young to enlist in the first draft but able to do so in March 1918. And there was a small photograph of a soldier standing at a distance in front of a pup tent – the "who, where, and when" of that photograph are all unknown.

But the image that yielded the most information was a large panoramic photograph of 136 soldiers. In white cursive handwriting at the bottom center of the image are the words: *Co "G" 315th Infantry, Camp Dix, N.J. May 1919.* And sitting in the third row, 6th in from the right, is my grandfather. There are few smiling faces in this photograph, the last taken of Company G. These are soldiers who survived the Great War.



Willis and Chester Bower, 1918



Chester and Charlie Bower, 1918



WWI soldier – location, date, and name unknown



Company G, 315th Infantry, Camp Dix, New Jersey, May 1919

This image was the catalyst to my exploration of Chester's WWI journey. My college degrees are in history and geography, so I knew something of the "war to end all wars." But I needed to re-learn the causes and progress of the war, and specifically focus on what was going on in the U.S. – politically, culturally, and economically – at that time, to understand how my grandfather fit into that history. And I especially needed to learn about where he had been in France, what engagements he fought in, and how he was able to survive when so many soldiers did not. I am only on the planet because my grandfather came home from the Great War; it became important to me to understand how and why.

This writing is excerpted from a longer essay, and documents what I have learned to date of my grandfather's life and WWI military service. There were no WWI letters from Chester among my mother's things, nor a diary. He received no medals and there were no medical records. My research sources are mostly secondary, with a few limited primary sources described herein. I have studied the 79th Division and 315th Infantry histories, along with materials produced by the American Battle Monuments Commission and numerous WWI books and online sources, including the Meuse-Argonne website where this essay is now posted.

Among my mother's books was a slender volume that provided an important link from the war to Chester's hometown of New Oxford: *Adams County in the World War: April 6, 1917 to November 11, 1918*, published in 1921 by Paul L. Foulk and Percy S. Eichelberger. It was not surprising that my mother had this book. Chester's younger sister, Mary, was married to Foulk in 1923, and my mother shared a special bond with her Aunt Mary, especially after Chester's death in 1939. Foulk and Eichelberger were cousins from New Oxford who both served in the war.

Research through Ancestry.com yielded copies of WWI and Civil War military service documents, census records, marriage and death certificates, obituaries, and grave site locations. Ancestry.com also provided access to articles in local newspapers (*New Oxford Item*, *Gettysburg Times*, *Gettysburg Compiler*, etc.) which were an invaluable resource for learning about everyday life in that part of Pennsylvania. Chester's Official Military Personnel File, originally housed at the National Archives' National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis, was destroyed in the fire that occurred there in July 1973. The Center did provide the one document still available, his Final Pay Voucher. I have also traveled to New Oxford and Philadelphia to find evidence of the Bower family in those areas, and visited my mother's older sister, my aunt, who is 96 at this writing and still living in California.

My research would not have been complete without a trip to the Meuse-Argonne itself, in November 2016. I am deeply indebted to Randal Gaulke, who was instrumental in furthering my knowledge and encouraging my travel to the area. He provided guidance about maps, weather, terrain, gear, accommodations, food, roads, hiking, language, monuments, and all the minutiae that goes into planning a trip of this kind. Most important was his assistance in finding a guide to help me make real the outline of my grandfather's WWI journey that I had developed from my own research. Markus Klauer is a researcher, author, historian, battlefield guide, hiker, landscape interpreter, preservationist, fluent in three languages, and has been active in the Meuse-Argonne for over 30 years. He helped me execute a 4-day itinerary during which we not only traced my grandfather's route in 1918, but also visited and hiked in places that reveal the older and more important French and German military presence in the area. His website is <http://www.weltkriegsbuch.de/>

Thanks are also due to Sebastian Wintermute (<http://www.sebastianwintermute.com/>) who offers outstanding photograph and document restoration services in New York City. I entrusted Sebastian with the task of scanning and digital repair and enhancement of the few photographs I have of my

grandfather's WWI life, along with other photographs and documents from my mother's collection. He did not disappoint, and I am now able to share these precious documents in restored digital form with my family and others. The black and white photographs in this essay reflect his work.

Chester's life before the war

Chester was living and working in Philadelphia when he was drafted in 1917. He had moved to the city from his family home in New Oxford some time before the 1910 census, which showed him living with his older brother, Willis, as lodgers in a boarding house on North 17th Street. Both were working for the Pennsylvania Railroad (PRR) at the Broad Street Station, Willis as a clerk and Chester as a messenger. Chester was 16 and Willis was 26. By the time he was drafted in 1917, Chester had moved from the boarding house to a residence on North 19th Street and was working as a clerk at the PRR.

Chester was in the middle of six children: Willis was the oldest, then two older sisters (Alice and Edna), Chester, then a younger sister (Mary) and brother (Charlie). The 1900 census showed that Chester's father and his brother Willis both worked at the Livingston Shoe Factory in New Oxford, and the 1910 census showed that his father was still working there along with Chester's older sister, Edna. This factory was built in 1899 and was a major source of employment in the area at least until the 1960s; it is one of the places that Chester worked after returning from the war.

Induction into the Army

Because voluntary enlistment numbers were low after war was declared, Congress enacted the Selective Service Act in May 1917, establishing compulsory military draft registration. June 5 was the date of the first draft registration for all men ages 21 to 30. Chester did not voluntarily enlist in April, but he did register on June 5 in Philadelphia. He was 22 years old.

Chester was inducted into the Army in Philadelphia on September 21, 1917. At this time, the U.S. military forces were divided into three groups: Regular Army (those who were already in the service and those who enlisted), National Guard (the organized militias of the states), and National Army (those who were drafted). Chester was assigned to the National Army, 79th Division, 158th Brigade, 315th Infantry, 2nd Battalion, Company G. The 79th Division was made up of men primarily from eastern Pennsylvania, Delaware, and the District of Columbia. The 315th Infantry became known as "Philadelphia's Own" since the majority of soldiers were from this city. Chester entered the Army as a Private and remained at this rank during his nearly two years of service.

The 79th Division was made up of two Brigades, the 157th and 158th. Each Brigade was made up of two Regiments (also called Infantry). The 313th and 314th Regiments made up the 157th Brigade, and the 315th and 316th Regiments made up the 158th Brigade. Each Regiment then had three Battalions, and each Battalion was made up of Companies. In the 158th Brigade, the First Battalion included Companies A, B, C and D. The 2nd Battalion, which was Chester's, included Companies E, F, G and H. The 3rd Battalion included Companies I, K, L and M. The average size of a Company was 100-250 soldiers, including the commanding officers. In addition to the Battalions, four special units were assigned to the 79th Division: Headquarters Company, Machine Gun Company, Supply Company, and Medical Detachment. This command structure was specifically created by General John Pershing for the WWI American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) in France.

The 79th Division trained at Camp Meade, located in Maryland about midway between Baltimore and Washington, D.C. The Commanding General of the Division was Major General Joseph E. Kuhn. By November 30, 1917 there were 40,000 men at Camp Meade. Transfers of men in and out of the various

regiments occurred constantly throughout the fall and winter of 1917-18 and into the spring of 1918. Men like Chester who arrived in September 1917 had nine months of training, but those who arrived in 1918 had as little as 2 to 5 months of training before going to France.

On March 26, 1918, Chester's younger brother Charlie enlisted in the Regular Army at Takoma Park, Maryland. At the time of the first draft registration in 1917, Charlie was only 19 and was not eligible for service, and he was still underage when he enlisted in 1918. It is possible that he was able to enlist because he had a medical background and entered the Army as an assistant embalmer with the medical corps. His medical background came from working as an assistant to the New Oxford undertaker, William Feiser, prior to enlistment. Feiser was related to Charlie's mother, Rebecca Feiser Bower. Charlie entered as a Private at the Medical Supply Depot at Camp Merritt, New Jersey and was then transferred to the Camp Mills Base Hospital on Long Island, New York.

Troop transport to France

In March, April and May of 1918, Germany launched the Spring Offensive along the Western Front in an attempt to end the war before U.S. forces could fully mobilize in France. President Wilson reviewed the 79th Division troops in Baltimore in April. General Kuhn and his advance detachment sailed for France on June 30 and arrived in Brest harbor, the westernmost port in France which received the majority of U.S. troops, on July 13.

On July 6-8, the 79th Division traveled by train from Camp Meade to the railyards in Jersey City, where they took a ferry a short distance north to Hoboken. Hoboken was the primary port of embarkation for troops to France, and it was home to major European shipping companies at this time. Because of the British naval blockade at the start of the war, German merchant vessels were typically forced to the nearest port. Many of the ships stuck in U.S. ports were seized by the Army in 1917 and converted to troop transport ships.

One half of the 79th Division (13,000 men) departed from Hoboken aboard the *Leviathan* on the evening of July 8. The *Leviathan* was originally built as the *Vaterland*, the largest German ocean liner built by the Hamburg-Amerika Line at that time, and was seized in New York Harbor in April 1917. The remaining troops, including Chester's regiment, departed aboard five ships in convoy on July 9. Chester departed on the *America* (originally the Hamburg-Amerika Line's *SS Amerika*), which carried 6,000 troops. During the night of July 14, Chester's ship rammed a British freight steamer, the *Indestructo*. Both ships were running without lights for safety. The British ship was cut nearly in two and sank within about seven minutes. The *America* rescued 11 of the 40 British crew but the rest were lost at sea.

The 79th Division convoy arrived in Brest harbor from July 15-18, and stayed at the Pontanezen Barracks about 5 kilometers north of the dock. From July 22-26, the Division traveled east by train to the 10th Training Area in Prauthoy, south of the Front. Pershing's AEF Headquarters was about 60 kilometers north in the village of Chaumont.

Leading up to the Meuse-Argonne Offensive

For the next 6 weeks (July 27 to September 8), the 79th Division underwent intensive training in the Prauthoy area. During late August, the Division was struck by the influenza pandemic, with about 600 cases of flu and 4% mortality. During September through November 1918, influenza and pneumonia sickened 30-40% of the U.S. Army and Navy personnel; it became a major cause of military deaths during the war years, killing more personnel than battlefield combat.

On September 7, the 79th Division's assignment was revealed: to take part in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. The objective of the Offensive was to end the war by breaking through the German front lines and capture the key German rail center at Sedan. It was named for the geographic area between the Argonne Forest on the west and the Meuse River on the east. This area had been held by the German Army since 1914; it contained several strategic high points from which the Germans could direct artillery and troop movements, and was heavily fortified. Although most of the 79th Division troops had completed far less training than needed for combat readiness, General Pershing assigned the Division the most difficult task of the Offensive, to capture the high point of Montfaucon, and break through the German trench system to the north. Just prior to the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, from September 12-15, the AEF conducted the St. Mihiel Offensive, which took the German salient just south of Verdun that had been held by the Germans since 1914. The 79th Division was not part of the St. Mihiel Offensive.

Through review of the 79th Division and 315th Infantry histories, I was able to plot the movements of my grandfather's regiment in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. These military histories provide only limited information at the Battalion and Company level, so I have assumed that where the 315th Regiment is described, my grandfather was with his unit. In the 2½ weeks prior to the Offensive, the 79th Division moved north to the Robert-Espagne camp area west of Bar-Le-Duc; they traveled primarily at night northeasterly along the Verdun – Bar-le-Duc Road. This road is called the Voie Sacrée, or the Sacred Way, for the vital role it played in transporting French troops, armaments, and supplies for the Battle of Verdun in 1916.

The 313th and 315th Regiments relieved the French divisions at the front line trenches on the evening of September 13 in the area known as Sector 304, the Avocourt-Malancourt Sector. This area was named for Hill or Côte 304, a high point that experienced substantial attack and counter-attack by the French and German armies during the Battle of Verdun. The French finally re-took Côte 304 in August 1917, which enabled the American troops to use it as one of the jumping off points for the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. On September 12, the *New Oxford Item* ran a small article stating that Chester's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas E. Bower, had received a letter from their son saying that he is enjoying good health "over there."

Orders were received on September 21 that the Meuse-Argonne Offensive would begin on September 26. During maneuvers to the trenches on the eve of the Offensive, one platoon of Chester's Company G was hit by a shell; seven were wounded, one later dying of wounds. These were the first casualties of Company G.

The Offensive – First Phase

The 79th Division's involvement in the Meuse-Argonne occurred in two of the Offensive's three phases, the first and the last. Their first engagement was from September 26-30 in the Montfaucon area. The order of town capture was identified as: Malancourt, Montfaucon, and Nantillois. The distance from the jump-off point in Sector 304 to Nantillois was about nine kilometers. The 79th Division was the right of three divisions that made up V Corps (Fifth Corps), which was assigned the primary responsibility for capturing Montfaucon. To the right of V Corps was Third (III) Corps, and to the left was First (I) Corps.

Difficult terrain, overwhelming enemy machine gun and artillery fire, a dense mixture of smoke and fog and rain, a lack of rations and water and rest, and confusion on the battlefield among the untested troops led to heavy casualties among all units and all ranks during these five seemingly endless days. The 315th Infantry lost three officers and 26 enlisted personnel on the first day alone. The Division's inability to take Montfaucon on the first day held up the advance in the center of the line, and gave the

Germans time to bring in reinforcements. This tarnished the reputation of the Division among military circles for some time. However, William Walker's 2016 book, *"Betrayal at Little Gibraltar: A German Fortress, a Treacherous American General, and the Battle to End World War I"* provides compelling evidence that the 79th Division was not entirely to blame for its failure to advance.

Chester's unit was able to advance as far as Bois des Ogons, just south of Madeleine Farm. Madeleine Farm housed a German hospital and the roof of the barn was marked with the Red Cross insignia, misleading the U.S. troops to thinking it was a safe place; they learned otherwise. The 316th Infantry (under the command of Major Harry Parkin) advanced through the Bois de Cunel on the northwest side of Madeleine Farm, the deepest advance into German lines of any Divisions active these days along the entire Front. Relief was finally ordered for the 79th Division and arrived early morning on September 30.

One of the officers of Company G who died on September 30 was Lieutenant Herman D. Partsch. Partsch is of interest to me because he was one of the few Californians, my home state, to serve as an officer in the 79th Division, and he was well liked by his men. Partsch was an engineering graduate of UC Berkeley. He was working in Pittsburgh, PA, for the Westinghouse Electric Company when war was declared in 1917. He went to officers training camp at Fort Niagara and was stationed at Camp Meade. He was married at Thanksgiving 1917 during a short visit home to Berkeley, and was 24 years old at his death. He is buried at the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery in Romagne-sous-Montfaucon.



Herman Partsch grave, Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery November 2016

79th Division moves to Troyon Sector

In early October 1918, the 79th Division marched south to the relatively quiet Troyon Sector near St. Mihiel to rest, continue training, and hold the line established in the St. Mihiel Offensive. Shelling by the Germans continued throughout this time, and battle fatalities continued to occur. From the period of October 8-27, seven men from the 315th Infantry were killed. The 79th also received 2,200 replacement soldiers at this time; most of these soldiers came from the far western and southern parts of the U.S., and most had received no infantry or rifle training.

On October 20, Chester's younger brother Charlie died of influenza/pneumonia while stationed at Camp Mills on Long Island, NY. He was 20½ years old. Charlie had been promoted twice during the short time

he was in service, to Private First Class and then to Sergeant. His older brother, Willis, was with Charlie when he died, and made the call to his parents in New Oxford, as reported in Charlie's obituary in the *New Oxford Item*. It is unknown if/when Chester received this news while at the Troyon Sector, or if it affected how he was deployed for the remaining few weeks of the war.

Final weeks at Côtes de Meuse – Third Phase

In October 1918, Pershing was still focused on capturing the rail hub of Sedan and driving the Germans from the commanding heights east of the Meuse River. These operations were led by the French Corps, with two American Divisions (including the 79th) as crucial participants. The focus was on punching east through the Bois de la Grande Montagne to the Woëvre Plain and into Germany. To do this it was necessary to take out a key hill fortification at la Borne de Cornouiller, known to the Americans as Corn Willy Hill. Similar to Montfaucon, this hill was heavily fortified and defended by the Germans as they could direct fire to any location on the 24-mile Meuse-Argonne front from here.

The U.S. 29th and 33rd Divisions had been fighting in this area in October but could not break through the German lines. The 79th Division began its northward movement on October 24, and order was given on October 27 that they would relieve the 29th Division on October 28-30 and advance to Cornouiller. On the night of October 28, they crossed to east side of Meuse River by a narrow footbridge at Brabant-sur-Meuse, then north to the Bois de Consenvoye and Molleville Farm by the morning of October 30, and on to Bois de Wavrille and Bois d'Etraye.

The attack on Cornouiller occurred November 3-6. The First Battalion of the 316th Infantry under Major Harry Parkin, and the First Battalion of the 315th Infantry under Major Ward Pierson, were the front line units. Chester's 2nd Battalion relieved the First Battalion on the night of November 3, and he reported being gassed on or around this date. The hill was taken on November 6 by the combined efforts of the 315th and 316th Infantries, though the 316th was given credit for the capture. Major Parkin was seriously wounded, and then taken prisoner with two other officers and 21 enlisted men.

The 79th Division continued to push east through Bois de la Grande Montagne, and on to the villages of Réville, Étraye, Wavrille, and Gibericy. Although the Germans were retreating east beyond the Thinte River, resistance in the area was still strong. Major Pierson was killed on November 9 along the railroad embankment running just east of the Damvillers-Azannes road, where the First and Second Battalions of the 315th were trying to advance the line.

On November 11 at 8 a.m. the message of the Armistice was received; hostilities would cease at 11 a.m. The 79th Division continued its advance eastward until exactly that moment, and gained the distinction of having pressed the furthest east into the German front east of the Meuse River. Chester's Company G was just east of Gibericy at the time of the Armistice.

The last soldier in Company G to die on November 11 was Private First Class Americo Di Pasquale from Pennsylvania. He received the Distinguished Service Cross posthumously for his actions that day. The award reads: *"...for extraordinary heroism in action while serving with Company G, 315th Infantry Regiment, 79th Division, A.E.F., near Verdun, France, 11 November 1918. Private Dipasquale volunteered his services as a connecting file, and during the course of operations was obliged to cross and re-cross fields swept by shell and machine-gun fire. His efforts were instrumental in keeping contact with the unit of his left. While he was thus engaged, Private Dipasquale was killed."* Di Pasquale immigrated to the U.S. in New York from Introdacqua, Italy in April 1910 at the age of 16. He was inducted into the Army in May 1918 in Philadelphia at age 24. An obscure document found through Ancestry.com indicates that

he applied for naturalization on May 2, 1918, but that the application was “dismissed without prejudice” on April 11, 1919, likely due to his death in the war. He is buried at the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery.



Americo Di Pasquale grave, Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery November 2016

From the Armistice to discharge at Camp Dix

After the Armistice, the 79th Division moved a short distance north to Damvillers, where they stayed to the end of 1918. During this time, the daily record that had been kept of men killed in action was amended to include men who were killed in action but the date was not known, and men who died of wounds after the Armistice. The total casualties (killed in action, wounded in action, and gassed) of the 315th Infantry were 1,485. There were several hundred more who were identified as missing in action or captured.

The Division received orders on December 24 to move south and proceeded to Souilly, the First Army's Headquarters for the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, where they stayed for the first three months of 1919. On February 22nd, the Division received word that it would return to the U.S. in June. At the end of March, the Division moved south in a 5-day 100-kilometer march to the Allied Fourth Training Area near Rimaucourt, about 25 kilometers northeast of Chaumont. Pershing reviewed the 79th Division troops for the last time on April 12 at Orquevaux (just east of Chaumont). On April 18, orders were given that the 79th would travel west to the Nantes area to prepare for embarkation to the U.S.

The move west occurred from April 21-27, along a route similar to the one followed when they arrived the previous summer. They spent three weeks here; among my mother's things were several picture postcards that Chester bought in Nantes and Vertou. On May 12, troops traveled by train to St. Nazaire on the Atlantic coast, where embarkations were to occur. On May 15, half of the 79th Division boarded the transport ship *USS Dakotan* and headed for the U.S. The remainder of the Division (including Chester's unit) boarded the transport ship *USS Santa Rosa* and departed on May 17.

The *USS Dakotan* arrived in Philadelphia on May 28, and the *USS Santa Rosa* arrived on May 30 after a 13-day crossing; troops then boarded a train to Camp Dix, New Jersey. The last parade of troops at Camp Dix was held on June 2, 1919. The 313th Infantry ("Baltimore's Own") decided to have a homecoming parade in Baltimore, but the balance of the Division voted to not have a welcome parade in Philadelphia or elsewhere. They were eager to get home.

Chester's total time at the Front, from September 8 to the Armistice on November 11, was about 64 days or about 9 weeks. His total time in military service was a little over 20 months. He was honorably discharged on June 7, 1919. Final discharge and dissolution of the 79th Division occurred on June 9; it had been existence for about 22 months.

POST-WAR LIFE

I was able to trace most of my grandfather's movements immediately after the war through several short articles that appeared in the *New Oxford Item*. It is evident from the articles that he had difficulty in employment after he returned, and this difficulty was reported to be medically related to being gassed in the war. After discharge from Camp Dix, he spent a few weeks at his parents' home in New Oxford, and then returned to Philadelphia to resume his position with the railroad in late June. He left this position in early August to return to live with his parents in New Oxford. A *New Oxford Item* article dated August 7, 1919 stated: *"While in action with 315th Infantry in France, young Bower was gassed and this has so affected his throat that he was obliged to resign the position with the railroad company. It is likely that he will accept a position in the New Oxford shoe factory."*

The next *New Oxford Item* article about his employment is dated September 11, 1919 and stated: *"Chester Bower, of Berlin Avenue, has accepted a clerical position in Harris Bros. shop, Center Square. Mr. Bower was gassed in action, and recently he had to give up a responsible position with the PRR in Philadelphia in order to be more in the open."* The 1920 census then confirmed that Chester was living at the Bower family home and working as a clerk in a retail clothing store. But an article after the census was taken, dated August 5, 1920, stated: *"Chester Bower has resigned as clerk in the Harris Brothers store."*

Chester married Goldie Marie Bentzel in May 1924. Goldie's family was from the New Oxford area, and we think they may have met sometime in 1922, as my mother saved some small notes and a birthday card from Chester to Goldie dated October that year. The newspaper article announcing their wedding identified that Chester was working at the Livingston Shoe Factory in New Oxford. Goldie was a single mother when they met, raising a daughter (my aunt) from her fiancé who died in early 1920 from the influenza pandemic; most of his family also perished from the flu at that time. Goldie had been a school teacher for a few years in the small community of New Chester about four miles north of New Oxford, having received a teaching degree from the Cumberland Valley State Normal School in Shippensburg, PA in 1918. At the time she married Chester, she identified herself as a dressmaker.

I have wondered about my grandfather's war sentiments before his military service. Although his heritage was German, we do not know if he had reluctance to go to war against the country of his ancestors, which had been reported during the war period. He also had two uncles on his father's side that served in the Union Army and survived the Civil War. One of these uncles, Leander Bower, was still living near New Oxford at the time of the Great War; he survived long enough to see Chester return from France, and died in 1922. How would the family have felt about serving in both wars: as a glorious patriotic duty or as a horrific experience to be avoided at all costs? We do not know.

One thing we do know is that Chester's war experience, in part, led to his conversion from the Lutheran Church to the Jehovah's Witness faith because of its religion-based objection to military service. He convinced Goldie to join him, and she remained in the Jehovah's Witness church for the rest of her life. She recalled that Chester told her he would often shoot in the air when on the battlefield because the war was "just Lutherans shooting Lutherans, and why would I want to do that." She also recalled that he told her he feared that he would never sleep between clean white sheets again.

The family rented rooms in a house on North Peters Street in New Oxford, and this is where my mother spent her childhood. This house is still standing and is just a few blocks away from the Bower family home on Berlin Avenue where Chester grew up. In addition to Goldie's daughter, they had two more children: a son Edgar, born 1926, and a daughter Rena, my mother, in 1927.



My mother Rena Bower, and her father Chester, about 1932

In 1927, Chester ran for and was elected New Oxford Borough Tax Collector. Chester's father had served for many years as the Secretary to the New Oxford Town Council, so public service work was within his family history. Chester continued to hold this position through the early 1930s. He also served as secretary to the New Oxford School Board in 1928. In addition to these positions, the 1930 census showed that he was still working as a cutter in the local shoe factory.

From a young age, Chester's son Edgar had frequent and severe earaches and infections, which eventually caused his deafness. He went to first grade in New Oxford, but had difficulty in school due to severe hearing loss. Sometime after this he was placed in the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf in Philadelphia, which was the third oldest school of its kind in the state that time. The school had an excellent reputation for its teaching methods, and still operates to this day in Philadelphia.

On February 21, 1935, Chester was appointed U.S. Postmaster for New Oxford for a four-year term. At that time, Postmaster appointments were recommended by the President and confirmed by the Senate. Up until 1927, the certificate of appointment was actually signed by the President; after that, the signatures were printed into the certificate. Chester's 1935 certificate has President Franklin D. Roosevelt's printed signature, and an original signature by James A. Farley, who was Postmaster General under FDR's first two terms. The landmark James Farley Post Office building in New York City is named for him. Chester was reappointed to the position in June 1939, again by FDR.

Just six months into his second term as Postmaster, Chester died at age 45 on December 30, 1939 in Hanover General Hospital. He had been admitted on December 21 and remained in hospital until his death. The cause of death was acute nephritis, also known as kidney disease or failure. My aunt, who was 19 years old and at University of Pennsylvania Nursing School, came home to help the family and her signature is on the death certificate. My uncle Edgar was at the Deaf School in Philadelphia, and my mother, who was 12, was at home.

We do not know if Chester being gassed in 1918 led to the nephritis cause of death. There are several types of nephritis and it has many causes. But the Bower family lore is that his death at the relatively young age of 45 was attributed in part to medical conditions arising from his war experience. One *New Oxford Item* article about Chester's return in June 1919 indicated that he was in the hospital for a short while to treat his gassing, but we have no military records about that hospital stay nor where it occurred. We also do not have any of his post-war medical records or even photographs of him after about age 40.

There was mention of Chester's temperament in a case report for his son Edgar from the mid-1950s, about 15 years after Chester had died. As my uncle aged, he developed some emotional disabilities in addition to his ongoing deafness. He had stayed at the Philadelphia School for the Deaf into his mid-20s, and my grandmother had his capabilities evaluated in 1955 when she was trying to determine the best place for him to live. In a section describing family history, the case report states that the father, Chester, was *"reported to have habitually talked to himself in a loud voice, laughing or swearing while in the adjoining rooms or in the bathroom. He habitually walked alone on the streets in the evenings and was noted by neighbors to talk to himself a great deal at such times."* We do not know if Chester's changing temperament was caused by his war experience, but it was part of the family narrative passed down by my grandmother.

Chester is buried in the New Oxford Cemetery, and his brother Charlie is buried nearby.



Chester Allen Bower grave, New Oxford Cemetery June 2016

My grandmother Goldie became the acting Postmaster in New Oxford upon Chester's death. She received a personal condolence letter from Postmaster General James Farley in January 1940. After passing the civil service exam with highest marks, she was confirmed by the U.S. Senate and officially appointed Postmaster on August 8, 1940. She held this position until her retirement in 1963 at age 65. Goldie died in 1985 in Hanover at age 86, and my uncle Edgar died in 1990 near Hanover at age 64. As noted above, my mother Rena died in Northern California in 2013, and her sister, my aunt, is still living in California.