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Arnold Whitridge: Scholar and Veteran of Two Armies and Two Wars

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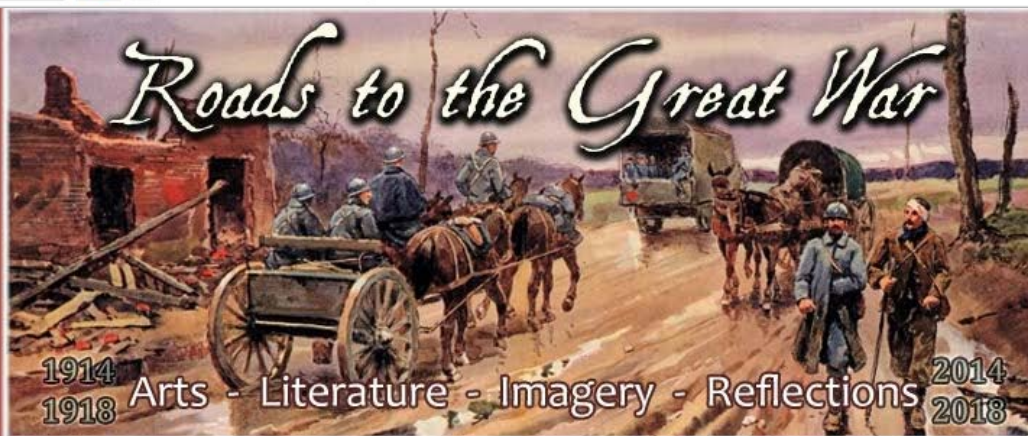
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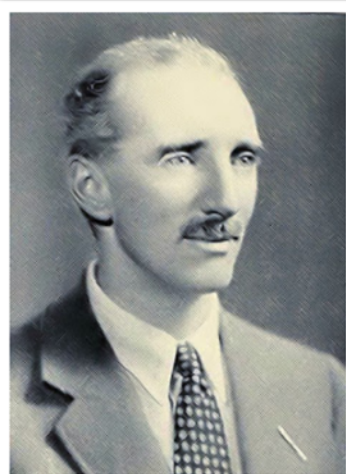
*Now all roads lead to France and heavy is the tread
Of the living; but the dead returning lightly dance.*

Edward Thomas, *Roads*

Sunday, January 29, 2017

Arnold Whitridge: Scholar and Veteran of Two Armies and Two Wars

By Keith Muchowski



Arnold Whitridge at Yale, 1936

Captain Arnold Whitridge of the British Royal Field Artillery arrived in New York City from London 100 years ago this month. Whitridge was returning to tend to the affairs of his father Frederick W. Whitridge, who had died two weeks earlier. Frederick Whitridge was president of the Third Avenue Elevated Line and a good friend of Theodore Roosevelt. He left an estate estimated at \$10 million, over \$188 million in current dollars. His son, young Arnold, had graduated from Yale in 1913 and was doing graduate work at Oxford when the war broke out in August 1914. Early the next year he joined the British Army. He was wounded at the Somme in 1916 and was in London when he learned of his father's passing on 30 December. While his name may not ring many bells, Arnold Whitridge was a decorated soldier of the Great War who went on to become one of the leading scholars of the 20th century. He was also the grandson and namesake of British poet Matthew Arnold. He died on 29 January 1989, 28 years ago today.

Whitridge served in both the British and American Armies during the war. In 1916 as a young second lieutenant he was awarded the British Military Cross, which authorities had created in December 1914 to recognize the contributions of junior officers holding the rank of captain or lower. Whitridge was not the only American serving with the British to be thus recognized; before the war's end Captain Kermit Roosevelt, Theodore Roosevelt's son, was similarly honored during the war for his contributions as a British Army officer in Mesopotamia. Whitridge soon made first lieutenant and was promoted to captain just prior to his father's death. Arriving in New York on 14 January 1917 Captain Whitridge told reporters he would be leaving the British Army to focus on family affairs.

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Royal Field Artillery Column in Mesopotamia

Arnold Whitridge, an American, was born in New Rochelle, New York, on 29 June 1891 to Lucy Arnold and Frederick W. Whitridge. The family lived in a large house on East 11th Street in Manhattan. They traveled to Europe frequently in the decades prior to the war and, true to his mother's British roots, maintained a summer residence in England. Whitridge may have thought he was leaving military service behind in that winter of 1917, but when the United States entered the conflict that spring he was back in a captain's uniform. He reported for duty at Governors Island in New York Harbor as an officer in the nascent A.E.F. come May, left for France on 25 June, and arrived in Paris on 5 July, one day after Pershing's appearance at Lafayette's grave at Picpus Cemetery. Captain Whitridge married Janetta Alexander, a New Yorker volunteering with the Y.M.C.A., at the American Church in Paris on 25 April 1918. Eleanor Butler Alexander Roosevelt, wife of Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., an officer in the First Infantry Division, threw the young couple a reception later that day. Captain Whitridge participated in most of the major American campaigns of the Great War, including at Aisne Marne, St. Mihiel, and the Meuse-Argonne. He was promoted to major two weeks prior to the Armistice and stayed on with the American Peace Commission through the signing of the Versailles Treaty. He arrived back in the United States in September 1919.

Whitridge Arnold		OFFICER-ORC White 363	
(Surname)	(Christian name)		
Residence:	16 East 11th St	New York	NEW YORK
	(Street and house number)	(Town or city)	(County) (State)
* Born in	New Rochelle N.Y.	June 29/91	
† Called into active service as	Capt F.A.	June 13/17	Fr ORC
Promotions:	Maj	Oct 26/18	
Organizations and staff assignments:	Intel Sec Hdqrs 1 Army C to Hdqrs 1 Corp F.A. to-- Hq 3rd Army Corp to disch		
Principal stations:	Hoboken, NJ; AEF.		
Engagements:	Aisne Marne; St Mihiel; Meuse Argonne		
Wounds received in action:	None.		
§ Served overseas	June 23/17 to disch		
Hon. disch.	Apr 22/19 for convenience of the Government, services no longer required.		
Was reported	0 per cent disabled on date of discharge in view of occupation.		
Remarks:			
Form No. 54e-1 A. G. O. Mar. 17, 1921.	* Give place and date. † Insert (a) grade; (b) arm or staff corps or department; (c) date; (d) source, civil life (CL), RA, NG, ORC, NA; and (e) designation of training camp attended, if any. ‡ Strike out if he did not attend a training camp. § Give dates of departure from and return to the United States. Give date.		

U.S Army Service Record Card

Whitridge returned to school in the 1920s and received a PhD from Columbia University in 1925. He taught English and history at Columbia, and then Yale, and served as master of Yale's Calhoun College from 1932 to 1942. He rejoined the U.S. Army after Pearl Harbor, serving in North Africa and elsewhere as a colonel in the Intelligence Office of the Ninth Air Force. Mrs. Whitridge too returned to duty, volunteering with the American Red Cross. When the war ended Arnold again resumed the academic life. He had a long, prolific career, and his body of work included books on the European revolutions of 1848, the American Civil War, the local history of Salisbury, Connecticut, biographies of the French nobleman and general Rochambeau, Romantic poet Alfred de Vigny, and his own great-grandfather,

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Arnold of Rugby. In addition there were reams of literary criticism to go along with magazine and newspaper articles on issues of the day. He edited a collection of grandfather Matthew Arnold's unpublished letters as well.

The Whitridges raised a family and split their time between New York City and Connecticut. They were quite active in their communities. Arnold was voted a trustee of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and served in that capacity for decades; Janetta held numerous service leadership positions as president of the Alliance Française, council member for the New York Botanical Garden, and trustee of the New York Public Library, among other endeavors. Janetta died in March 1973, and Arnold passed away in Salisbury, Connecticut, 16 years later, aged 97.

Our contributor, Keith Muchowski, produces an outstanding blog that looks at American history from a New Yorker's viewpoint. Visit Keith's Blog, *The Strawfoot*, for more interesting insights on the history of the First World War.

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1 comment:

Margaret, Sydney, Australia January 30, 2017 at 2:57 AM

Gosh what a great untold story. A fascinating man who contributed so much to not only his country but to Great Britain as well.

Survived the Great War, successfully returned to academic civilian life and then did it all again in WW2.

Wonderful wife, who also carved out her own independence and contributed to society.

It would make a wonderful film I reckon.

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