

Send the Alabamians

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By Bob Martin, Publisher

"I stood on the edge of quiet fields stretching away to woods, near the small French town of Fère-en-Tardenois in the Marne Valley. Before me loomed a monumental and poignant figure: an American soldier in World War I carrying a dead comrade from the battlefield. There is not much else here: a simple inscribed plinth and a bench, a sense of past loss, and silence.

A French friend had told me about this memorial to the Battle of Croix Rouge Farm, and in April when I was in Paris, I came to see it myself. My larger goal was to visit at least a small part of the land fought over in both the First and Second Battles of the Marne. In advance of the approaching centenary of World War I (1914-1918), I wanted to sense something of the experience of American soldiers, who were key participants in the last year of the war. The story of this single battle and of the memorial's creation was my first window into the fierce drama of 'the war to end all wars,' and the American role, which I knew little about."

Those were the words of The New York Times' Nancy Newhouse last fall. .

It was the son of one of those Alabama infantrymen who commissioned that memorial on the site. It pays tribute to the 167th (Alabama) Infantry Regiment a part of the United States 42nd Infantry (Rainbow) Division ("Rainbow" because the division was formed of units from 26 states and the District of Columbia). Dedicated the day after Armistice Day, 2011, the tribute was the longtime dream of Montgomery's Rod Frazer, whose father, Sgt. William Johnson Frazer, was

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awarded a Purple Heart after the battle. The memorial came into being in ample time for anniversary No. 100 of the Great War.

Frazer's book "Send The Alabamians" tells the story of the men of the 167th from recruitment to the bloody fields of France in the final months of World War I, soldiers whose service Gen. Douglas MacArthur commented at the time "had not been surpassed in military history." The book borrows its title from a quip by Gen. Edward H. Plummer who commanded the young men during the early days of their service and who exclaimed: "In time of war, send me all the Alabamians you can get but in time of peace, for Lord's sake, send them to somebody else."

The ferocity of the Alabamians, so likely to get them in trouble back home, proved invaluable on the battlefield. At the climactic Battle of Croix Rouge, the men of the 167th exhibited unflinching valor and, in the face of machine guns, artillery shells and poison gas, sustained casualty rates over 50 percent but overran the Germans.

It has been said, and I agree, that the book was "richly researched yet grippingly readable." Historians of the war, regimental historians, military history buffs, and those interested in previously unexplored facets of Alabama history will appreciate its contents.

Gen. David Petraeus calls it "an exceedingly well-researched, highly detailed account of Alabama's 167th Infantry and why the men of the 167th were hailed as 'The Immortals' by newspapers of the time."

Author Winston Groom calls it "a valuable chronicle of the 167th Alabama Regiment of the 42 Rainbow Division to which it belonged and the U. S. Army role in WWI.

Rod Frazer is a retired investment banker and former CEO of Enstar. He earned his MBA at Harvard and was awarded the Silver Star for his military service in the Korean War. His research on the Rainbow Division stems from his father's stories.

The book was published by The University of Alabama Press. Proceeds will benefit the Croix Rouge Farm Memorial Foundation.

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Bob Martin is editor and publisher of The Montgomery Independent. He is the publisher of *The Millbrook Independent*

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