It was over 90 years ago, but Ned Felder, like most men, had hopes and aspirations; he lived 16,113 troubled days; and then died in despair. On April 2, 1917, President Wilson declared war against Germany. Ned saw this as an opportunity to show patriotism and secure a place as an equal citizen. "The world must be made safe for democracy," Wilson said. Negroes thought it would be insincere, for the country to fight for democracy in Europe while they remained second-class citizens. Over one million Negroes responded; roughly 370,000 were inducted. Within a week the War Department stopped accepting Negro volunteers. Comprised entirely of white men, the draft boards began to draft Negroes into service. At 10% of the population, Negroes supplied 13% of inductees.

In January 1918 Ned was registered for military service. On the word of a white spectator, Ned is collared, kicked, jailed, and fined for “disloyal talk” towards white troops. By April, he’d entered the 92nd Infantry Division. Over 200,000 Negroes fought with the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) in France. Negro units fought with the French Army; none fought alongside white American troops.

Ned’s 367th Infantry was cited for bravery and awarded the distinguished French Croix de Guerre. On February 17, 1919, Negro soldiers marched up Fifth Avenue and into Harlem before some 250,000 onlookers. Overseas they learned skilled trades and hoped for better jobs; but skilled jobs were closed to Negroes. Shellshock, racism, oppression, and terrorism made life hard but is largely un-noted in post WWI narratives. Angered at the equal treatment the French had given Negroes, white mobs nationwide lynched seventy Negro veterans—many still in uniform—in the first year after the war.

“We must not eat with them, must not shake hands with them, seek to talk to them or to meet with them outside the requirements of military service. We must not commend too highly these troops, especially in front of white Americans.”

—General John J. Pershing, commander of the AEF in Europe, in a communiqué concerning Negro troops sent to the French military, August 7, 1918.

There is still little honor for these men. Little is said of the sacrifice of colored troops. After WWI Ned marries his grandmother. Their only child, my mom, remembered “we won the war, but lost the man.” Records from Florida State Hospital for the Insane in Chattahoochee, Florida describe a Bi-Polar man with “Manic Depressive Psychosis.” How’d this aspiring young man end up an “inmate” in a State institution?

“Since admission he becomes upset; fights other patients or anyone with whom he comes in contact; requires restraint to control him.”

“When admitted, did not know anything about his family, nor cared. good physical condition; much ego.”

Bipolar or PTSD, can onset from severe stress. Those with the disorder can have a "precipitating event" that sets it off. I believe they earned it. Let’s show respect for fallen heroes like Ned Felder.