



# Year of the Veteran

1917-1919

## Red Hook and the 'War to End All Wars'

*Editor's note: This is part of a year-long series of articles by town, village and city historians about the World War I era as Dutchess County recognizes "The Year of the Veteran" with the Dutchess County Historical Society. If you have information relating to the time around WWI in Dutchess County, call (845) 471-1630 or visit [dchsny.org](http://dchsny.org).*

by Christopher Klose,  
Historic Red Hook  
Contribution by jim donick

"From the beginning of the United States ... the citizens of Red Hook have ever been loyal and patriotic, and always ready to respond ... in times of national peril. Hence, the entry of the country into the World War, April 6, 1917, found our citizens responsive to the nation's needs," reported Frances E. Crouse in her meticulous "Red Hook, New York in the World War."

Indeed, Red Hook was proud to make a difference "over there." Answering Uncle Sam's call to arms, 161 townsmen eventually served in the Armed Forces. Eight of them paid the ultimate price: either killed in action or succumbed to disease. Gone but not forgotten, each Memorial Day we honor their sacrifice: Victor Chapman, Charles Brizzie, Richard M. Coons, Fred Harris,

Bertram E. Lown, Harry A. Rhynders, William M. Sistare Jr. and John K. Smith.

Chapman, of Barrytown, was the first-ever American aviator to be killed in war. At the war's outbreak in August 1914, he joined the French Foreign Legion, spent a year in the trenches, then transferred to the French Aviation Service in late-1915. Earning his "wings," he helped found the famed Lafayette Escadrille (The Lafayette Flying Corps) of American volunteers, and was shot down in a dog fight near Verdun on July 23, 1916, while flying to a rear area on a mission of mercy. Chapman was carrying oranges to a hospital-bound comrade who had been badly shot up a few days previously.

Rhynders was one of the last Americans to die in action. A private in Company A, 327th Infantry, 82nd Division, he was killed on Oct. 10, 1918, in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. On the 10th of October Rhynders' division, having just relieved the 1st Division, was in action along the river Aire, just north of Fléville. Private First Class Harry Rhynders likely fell there. The war was over a month and a day later.

Both Chapman and Rhynders are buried in France.

On the home front, Red Hook turned in a mighty effort, as well. For example, Crouse recorded that the 291 members of the Red Hook circle of the Red Cross made "14,264 surgical dressings, 5 comfort kits, 199 pairs of socks, 99 sweaters and 28 scarfs [sic]." And that the 'Victor Chapman' Red Cross Circle had responded overwhelmingly to the Tivoli Times-Journal appeal to "You housewives who can put up those tempting delicious jellies ... send a few jars to France ... daily the wounded beg for jams, for chocolate, for jelly, for plain sugar ... it is a fact that wounds will not heal unless there is a certain amount of sugar in their systems." The Circle had produced at least "90 knitted garments, 225 [other] garments, 7 hot water bottles" and hundreds of surgical dressings "for the cause."

Astonishingly, our small farming town of some 3,800 people contributed a total of \$444,740 – just more than \$8 million in today's dollars – to the nation's five "Liberty Bond" drives between 1917 and 1919 to finance our participation in the war. Like the rest of the country, Red Hookers were responding to the government's



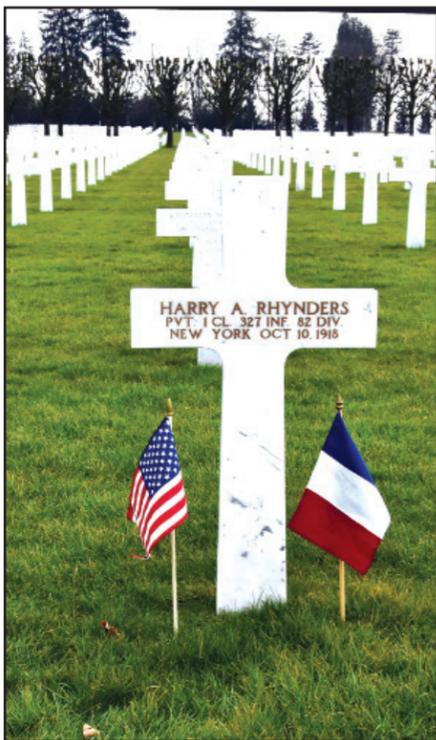
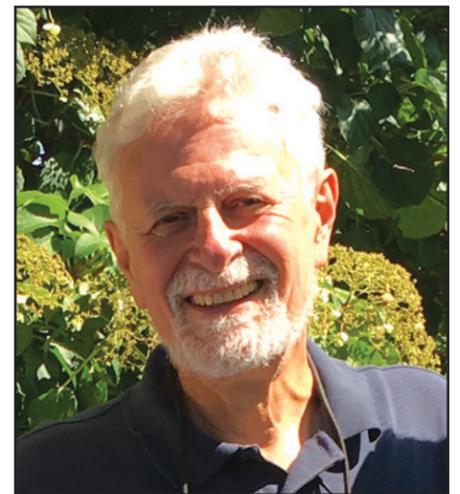
Red Hook's own Victor Chapman was the first American aviator to be killed in the war. Fellow townsman Harry A. Rhynders (see cross, below) was one of the last Americans to die in action in World War I. Bottom: The local Red Cross chapter was busy on the home front making sure the soldiers received necessary supplies, as well as sweet treats. *Courtesy photos and photo by jim donick*

patriotic call, but also to the promise of substantial returns when the bonds matured. Altogether, Americans raised a staggering \$20 billion, practically \$360 billion now, to equip our "doughboys" with the tanks, guns, planes, mules and horses, uniforms, boots, bayonets and helmets they needed for victory in Europe.

On June 1, 1919, Red Hook demonstrated its finest in a grand "welcome home!" celebration for our boys. The festivities began with a 1 p.m. ballgame between the "DePeyster team, of Madalin, and the Subway Giants, of New York, in Chanler park..." followed by a "3:30 parade headed by the Griffing Band ... 60 of the returned service men in uniform ... and a long line of flag and bunting trimmed automobiles containing veterans of the Civil War..." and, for the guests of honor, a "clam bake ... moving picture show at the Lyceum ... and dance with which the joyful activities of the

day ended."

*A retired reporter and magazine editor, Chris Klose is a member of the board of Historic Red Hook.*



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