
Chapter 2

Harry Irwin Briggs

Birth to Marriage, 1891–1919

Irwin, as my Grandpa Briggs was called, was born in March of 1891, in Danville, Illinois. He grew up on a farm in Ainsworth, Nebraska, with his six brothers and four sisters.

Irwin's father, Clinton Lane Briggs, grew up in Illinois, where he was a music and an elementary teacher. In the early 1880s, Clint, his father, and brothers went to Nebraska, and Clint purchased 160 acres of Brown County land. He lived on it long enough to prove his claim, then returned to Illinois where he met and married Marium Indianola Clark.

Marium Indianola Clark Briggs, my great grandma, had blue eyes and blond hair. Indy, as Clint called her, was a piano teacher. I (Louise) have a faint memory of Great Grandma Briggs playing the *Black Hawk Waltz* on the piano when she was in her eighties.

Clint and Indy's first child, Elmer, lived less than two months and died in 1890. When Irwin was born in 1891, Clint went to Nebraska to establish a home for his family. Indy packed their belongings and traveled by train to join Clint in Nebraska.

In Ainsworth, Nebraska, 10 more children were born. Clint was a farmer and raised cattle and hogs. When he was in his 60s, he sold his land, except for 80 acres.



Irwin Briggs' parents, Clint and Indy Briggs, and siblings. The children are listed by age starting with the oldest: Irwin, Ira, Verna, Orie, Charlotte, Carl, Howard, Catharine, Lewis, Grace, and Floyd.

Children of Clint and Indy Briggs

Elmer BRIGGS 1889–1890.

Harry Irwin BRIGGS 1891–1958.

Irwin married Amanda Myrtie Crabtree, my grandma.

Ira Alvin BRIGGS 1893–1984.

Ira married Pearl Blankenship.

Verna N. BRIGGS 1894–1954.

Verna Nannie married Felix Flowerdew.

Orie James BRIGGS 1896–1976. Orie married Evangeline Young.

Charlotte C. BRIGGS 1898–1980.

Charlotte Carrie married Charles Thomas Dillon.

Carl Elwin BRIGGS 1901–1982.

Carl married Lila Kolb.

Howard C. BRIGGS 1903–1990

Howard Clinton married Devere Greenlee.

Catharine F. BRIGGS 1905–1969.

Catharine Freelove married Harry Ward.

Lewis C. BRIGGS 1907–2003.

Lewis Clark married Mildred Bradley. Their daughter, Clara Jean Briggs Whan, wrote the *Briggs Heritage* book about the descendants of Clint and Indy—before computers, and has been very encouraging and helpful.

Grace I. BRIGGS 1909–1962.

Grace India married Willis Lee.

Floyd O. BRIGGS 1911–1993.

Floyd Owen married Esther Bradford.



High school graduation photo of Harry Irwin Briggs .



Irwin Briggs with a friend.

Young Irwin Briggs

The following story about Irwin comes from memories of his daughter, Mary Briggs Austin (my mom), with some additions by Mildred Briggs Lufburrow, Mary's sister and also a daughter of Irwin and Myrtle (Crabtree) Briggs.

One of my dad's first recollections was his first day at school. The other kids put him down in some sort of pit and burned the grass all around the edge up above him. Then the school bell rang and they all left him and went to class. After a while, one of the little boys began to cry. The teacher tried to find out what the problem was. He said, "They've burned the little Briggs boy at the stake."

When the teacher rescued him, Daddy jumped on his little pony and rode for home as fast as he could go. It was a year or two before they could get him to go back to school again.

One other time he was all excited to be able to stay overnight at a friend's house. When they were eating supper, the parents fought, even kicking each other under the table. This was too much for my dad as his parents didn't fight, so he ran out and got on his pony and headed for home.

There were a lot of funny things that happened among those mischievous boys (and girls, too.)

Daddy told of a hired man who loved raw eggs. He'd crack them, throw his head back and swallow. My dad and one of his brothers got hold of a rotten egg and gave it to him. When he cracked it—you can guess! He picked up his pitchfork and chased them and they hollered to the top of their voices for their mother to open the door for them. When she saw the hired man chasing "her boys"

with a pitchfork, she really gave him a "dressing down."

Another time the boys simply got tired of milking the cows, so they sneaked into the pantry while their mother was busy in the kitchen getting supper, and filled themselves with cookies and milk. Then they went and told her they were just so tired they were going to go to bed without any supper. When their father came in she relayed the message about these "poor tired boys" going to bed without any supper even.

Their papa called one of the younger boys and told him to go and get the fishing poles and tackle. Now you have to know how seldom they got to go fishing and how much they loved to go fishing. Well, they all jumped out of bed, dressed and came down the stairs. As each one came down, their father handed them their milking pail!

Their mother was a piano teacher. She'd give Daddy lessons, but was always so busy she didn't have time to check on his playing. He liked to play chords on the piano and though he could play nearly every instrument except reed instruments, he never could play two hands at one time on the piano.

Daddy also told how when the babies were young his mother would sit in a rocker rocking the youngest, sometimes, rocking another one in a cradle with her foot. She'd have my dad get into the cradle with the little one, sometimes, and then he'd rock it to sleep.

Some of the children walked in their sleep. One night one of them got up and got a dipper of cold water (they kept water upstairs so they'd have it handy), walked over, pulled the covers back and dumped the whole

dipper of cold water right on Papa's stomach!

My dad said he woke up one morning and he had walked out into the corn patch in his sleep (he had taken his pillow) and when he tried to get back to the house, had quite a time because of the many sand burrs. He couldn't figure out how he'd ever walked out there in his sleep through those sand burrs.

Daddy told about how excited he was one Christmas to get a sleigh. Things like that were rare indeed, but he went and tied it to a cow's tail. The cow, of course, ran and the little sleigh got smashed to pieces.

Another recollection was when a neighbor came all excited to the door to tell his mother about his sister Verna walking along the roof edge with her older brothers. His mama didn't care, but to calm down the neighbor, made Verna get down.

To get a high school education, dad had to live in Ainsworth and "batch" it, because it was too far to go back and forth to the farm.

Sometime during this period, he saw a violin he wanted very much, but, naturally, couldn't get it. Imagine his feelings when, upon graduation, his Papa put that violin in his hands? He treasured it the rest of his life.

Sometime after high school, my dad went west to Idaho to work in the mines.

Note: Some of the Briggs information came from Briggs Heritage, a book about Clint and Indy Briggs, their descendants and ancestors, written by Cousin Clara Jean Briggs Whan.

I have included more Briggs family information, photos, and letters my grandpa Briggs sent me in the Appendix. ❀



1914 photo caption: "When I was a bachelor, I lived by myself."



Bachelor Irwin Briggs. Caption: "My favorite pastime."

Ainsworth, Nebraska



Farming in Ainsworth, Nebraska.

The area around Ainsworth was known as Sioux Country when Nebraska was admitted to the union in 1867. In the 1870s, cattlemen and ranchers settled the area ahead of the railroad which first arrived in Ainsworth on June 11, 1882.

In the late 1870s and early 1880s, there was a struggle between gangs of horse thieves and the vigilantes. "Doc" Middleton, leader of the most notorious horse thief gang, was captured and sent to prison in 1879. "Kid" Wade, the most famous of Middleton's followers, was finally captured and hanged by a lynching party at Bassett, just east of Ainsworth.

Ainsworth was named for Captain James E. Ainsworth, chief construction engineer of several of the railroads. Captain James arrived at the town site June 1882.

Pioneers pushed west and set up shops and businesses. Many also filed for 160 acre homesteads. Ainsworth was incorporated as a village on December 2, 1883. By 1885, the town covered nearly 30 blocks, and Main Street was crowded with shops. ❀



Ainsworth Library.



Photo caption: Mowers and rake.

Irwin Briggs in World War I



Irwin in WWI barracks.

Military Service of Harry Irwin Briggs

by Cal Bivens

Harry Irwin Briggs served as a Private 1st Class in Evacuation Hospital Company #1 and Evacuation Hospital #37, American Expeditionary Forces (AEF). He enlisted in the army July 7, 1917, at Ft. Logan, Colorado. He was 26 years old at the time of his enlistment, and gave as his occupation, minister. Irwin's enlistment record shows that he was single, had dark brown eyes, dark brown hair, a ruddy complexion, and stood 5'10" tall.

Irwin was sent to Ft. Riley, Kansas, for training. He received a typhoid vaccination on July 16, 1917, and paratyphoid vaccination on December 22, 1917, in preparation for overseas duty. The 89th Infantry Division was being organized and trained at Ft. Riley at that time.

Overseas Duty

Irwin's records show that he left the United States on May 10, 1918, indicating that he left with



Irwin Briggs, on the march, France, 1918.

the advanced party from 89th Division headquarters. The 89th Infantry Division, was assigned to the IV Corps, AEF.

Irwin sailed aboard a troop ship for France, most probably from Camp Upton, Yaphank, Long Island, New York. They sailed from New York to France via England.

Evacuation hospitals were authorized in the number of

two per division. However, that number of evacuation hospitals was never achieved. Each evacuation hospital originally provided for 432 patients, but in the summer of 1918, their capacity was increased to 1,000 beds. In emergencies their capacity was further increased.

These units were under the control of the commanding generals of the sections in which they were located; control was exercised through the surgeon on the staff of the section commander. They were located at railheads, where they received all patients from the front that were to be sent to base hospitals on the line of communications. They were supplemented by other army hospitals which cared for gassed patients by three neuropsychiatric hospitals and by certain militarized units furnished by the American Red Cross.

The St. Mihiel Offensive

Irwin's outfit participated in the St. Mihiel offensive of September 1918; and the occupation of an unknown Sector, September to November 1918. St. Mihiel is a



France, 1918.

Irwin Briggs in World War I (*cont'd.*)

town in north-eastern France, southeast of Verdun. One of the most significant battles of World War I was fought there from September 12 to 16, 1918. Total Allied forces involved in the offensive numbered more than 650,000; some 550,000 American and 100,000 Allied (mostly French) troops. In support of the attack the First Army, AEF, had over 3,000 guns, 400 French tanks, and 1,500 airplanes.

The American Expeditionary Force trained hard for several months in preparation for fighting against the German armies. Also General Pershing had ordered the creation of a tank force to support the AEF's infantry. As a result, by September 1918, Colonel George S. Patton Jr. had finished training three tank brigades for the upcoming offensive at the St. Mihiel salient.

The ground became almost impassible to both the tanks and infantry, after five days of rain. The weather section of I Corps stated: Visibility: Heavy driving wind and rain during parts of day and night. Roads: Very muddy.

Other obstacles to the American operation were the many in-depth series of trenches, wire obstacles, and machine-gun nests that the Germans installed to augment their defensive positions. Therefore:

The Renaults (French tanks) designed to cross six-foot trenches in dry weather, were being forced by their crews to negotiate line after line of trenches that were eight feet deep and ten to fourteen feet wide 'in horrible mud.'

Further, the battlefields' key terrain was control of the



Ambulance Corps.

villages: Vigneulles, Thiaucourt, and Hannonville-sous-les-Cotes, because their rapid capture would ensure the envelopment of the German divisions near St. Mihiel. To do this, the American forces would breach the trenches and then advance along the enemy's logistical road network toward their objectives.

The First Army took 15,000 prisoners and 257 guns at a cost of about 7,000 casualties.

Hospital Center, Mars-Sur-Alliers

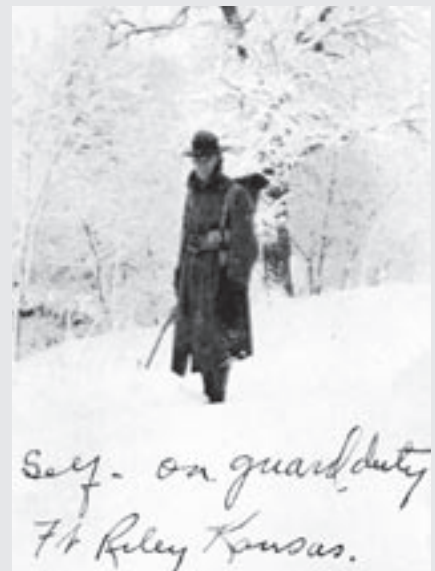
On January 10, 1919, Evacuation Hospital No. 37, with twenty-one officers and two hundred and twenty-two enlisted men arrived at Mars-sur-Alliers, commonly referred to by the men to as Mars.

The hospital center at Mars had 700 buildings covering a ground space of thirty-three acres and included the usual road, water, sewerage, and lighting facilities of a municipality. The hospital center was a Type A hospital. It had nearby a 4,000 bed Convalescent Camp.

Railroad sidings ran into the center and the hospital units



Irwin and friend, John Allison.



*Sgt. on guard duty
Ft Riley Kansas.*

Irwin on guard duty at Ft. Riley, Kansas.

Irwin Briggs in World War I (cont'd.)



Photo caption: "The principal part of a soldier is his feet. He must march, march, march and he must have shoes large enough to be comfortable and give his feet room to spread out."

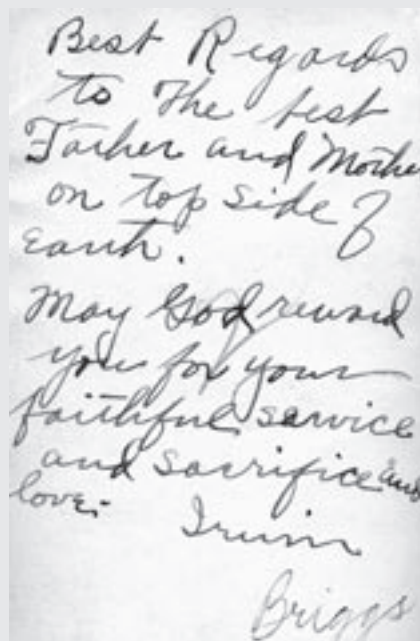


Photo caption: "To Mom and Dad from Irwin: Best Regards to the best Father and Mother on top side of earth. May God reward you for your faithful service and sacrifice and love. Irwin Briggs."

were grouped on either side, thus making it possible to stop the train in front of any hospital designated to receive patients. The Alliers River was some four miles away.

Mars was one of the larger intermediate section facilities. The normal capacity of this facility was 11,468 patients, though in emergency it could be expanded to 20,000. On the average it held 8098 patients.

On January 12, the hospital property was turned over to Evacuation Hospital No. 37, and the next day all the remaining patients were transferred to this outfit.

Evacuation Hospital No. 37 relieved Base Hospitals No. 48, No. 14, and No. 35, for their return to the United States.

All laundry work had to be done at Nevers, the nearest city of any size. A laundry was under construction in the Mars center when the Armistice was signed.

Bread at first was obtained at Nevers also. Later a bakery company established a bakery, which proved very efficient and adequately met all demands.

The hospital center at Mars-sur-Alliers was discontinued on May 20, 1919.

Return to the US

Irwin returned to the United States in the same manner he had left—aboard a troop ship. Brest, St. Nazaire, and Bordeaux became the principal embarkation ports, in France. Marseilles and Le Havre were added later.

Irwin landed in the United States on July 6, 1919. He likely came into New York and spent some time at Camp Upton before

Irwin Briggs in World War I (*cont'd.*)

being sent west by train. Camp Upton had been made into a debarkation camp, as the men returned from overseas to be discharged. The American Railroad Association had an office with 24 hour telephone switchboard service, and handled all the railroad operations for the troop movements in and out of the camp. The railroad ticket clerks worked nights making up the tickets for the lists of men who were being sent out the next day to destinations all over the country.

Irwin went by rail to Camp Dodge, Iowa, and was placed in Casual Detachment 1014, Demobilization Group, as unassigned. Camp Dodge was the demobilization station for the 89th Infantry Division. He was discharged at Camp Dodge on July 14, 1919.

The records for his separation physical showed him to be in good health. His records also note that his character was excellent. The Army paid him up-to-date, including a \$127.49 bonus. He was ready to go home. ❀



Irwin reading the Bible.



General Headquarters, American Expeditionary Force Patch.



Evacuation Company No. 1, Evacuation Hospital No. 37



WWI service in France medallion.



WWI Honorable Discharge pin.



Medical Center, Mars-sur-Alliers, France, September 1918. Photo of Medical Center and uniform emblems are from the collection of Cal Bivens.