

FEATURE ARTICLE

Three Wilmette Airmen in World War I

by Patrick Leary

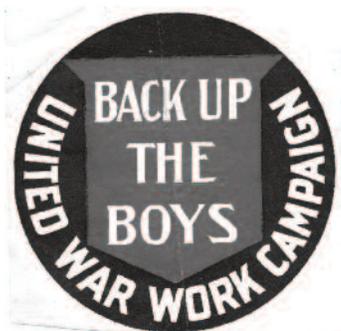
Visit our new exhibit
on World War I

“Over Here
and
Over There”

Lower level gallery



Hubert and Ben Reinwald pose with their gas masks at their Gross Point home, 1918



Decals like this one for the “United War Work Campaign” were issued for citizens to display in their windows as a sign that they had contributed money to the war effort.

These and many other rare photographs and artifacts from the World War I era in Wilmette and Gross Point are currently on display in this exhibit, which commemorates the 100th anniversary of America’s participation in the war.

Eugene Blanchard Jones—everybody knew him as “Gene”—graduated from New Trier High School, and went on to a couple of years of college before joining the Air Service. After months of training, he was commissioned 1st Lieutenant and sent to France in October 1917, where he was soon assigned to the Army’s 95th Aero Squadron, the first U.S. squadron on the Western Front whose main purpose was to pursue and fight enemy aircraft. In June 1918, he was transferred to another pursuit group, the 103rd, at the request of its commander, the legendary American ace, Major William Thaw. After seeing Jones battle a superior number of



German planes, Thaw described him in a letter as “one of the most skilled and reliable pilots in this command.”

On September 13, 1918, during an aerial battle with eight attacking German fighters, a tracer bullet hit the gas tank of Jones’s plane, which burst into flames. Jones leapt to his death. Members of the 168th Infantry saw him fall and recovered his body, which was buried with full military honors in France. In the spring of 1921 his remains were brought home and laid to rest beneath an impressive stone in Memorial Park Cemetery, Skokie. He is also honored with a bronze plaque at St. Augustine’s Episcopal Church on Wilmette Avenue.

Franklin Barney Bellows of 1109 Greenwood Ave. was also a graduate of New Trier, and of Northwestern. Commissioned a Second Lieutenant in the Air Service, he joined the Artillery Observation Service in September of 1918 as an observer. On the second day of the pivotal St Mihiel offensive, Jones and another officer flew a reconnaissance mission several miles behind the German lines. On the return trip, flying less than 800 feet off the ground,



Bellows was mortally wounded by German machine-gun fire. He was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Cross and the Croix de Guerre. A stained-glass window in Kenilworth Union Church commemorates Bellows’s sacrifice, and Bellows Field in Hawaii was named after him in 1933.

Louis Mason Bruch of 1201 Greenwood Ave. was so eager to serve that he applied for officer training seventeen times and underwent three operations before at last securing acceptance in



December 1917. Arriving in France the following September as a Second Lieutenant, he made daily flights over enemy lines. On November 10, 1918, Bruch had flown at low altitude for over three hours, under a bank of fog, to survey the entire battle line, when he was killed instantly by fire from an anti-aircraft gun. The war ended the next day, Armistice Day, making Louis Mason Bruch one of the last casualties of World War I. In 1921, members of the First Methodist Church of Wilmette planted an elm tree and unveiled a plaque in his memory.