

# Mrs. Krueger's Boys

The Feds take on a Clark County family. by Paul Peterson, CVM intern

Ruminate the irony. Four brothers who called themselves pacifists/conscientious objectors lay wounded under heavy fire because they refused to register for the draft. For the Krueger boys, the horrors of war hit home both literally and figuratively.

Caroline Krueger gave birth to four boys (Frank, Louis, Leslie, and Ennis) during the late years of the 19th century in Clark County. Operating a sawmill, the daily chores of farming, and the passing of their father quickly transformed the four boys into men.

Meanwhile, in Europe, the Great War was on its course. The Western front was a graveyard collecting lives at an astonishing rate. After years of a French and German stalemate, the U.S. entered the war. In June of 1917 the U.S. ordered all men between the ages of 21 and 30 to register for the draft. Louis and Leslie (26 and 24) obeyed and registered.

The months passed and casualties mounted. The Western Front had collected all the lives the French were willing to give. The War Department needed more men to continue the war. Thus the draft age requirements swelled to include all men between the ages of 18 and 45. Frank and Ennis fell into the age categories and were now required to register. On September 12, 1918, Frank and Ennis completed their daily routine at the Krueger farm. But they neglected one duty off the homestead. Frank and Ennis failed to register for the draft.

Deputy Marshall Joseph Ganes, Special Government Agent C.E. Marks, Village Marshall of Owen Peter Rasmussen, and prominent citizen Earl Kidd arrived at the Krueger farm early in the morning on September 14, 1918. The four men greeted Mrs. Krueger respectfully. She explained that only three of her boys were on the farm. Frank and Ennis were in the cornfield and Leslie was in the barn. Louis was far from home working the harvest somewhere in the Dakotas.

The four lawmen got into their car and drove 60 rods (approx-

a rifle and shot at the officers. The government agents returned fire but failed to strike the Kruegers as they zigzagged through the field until they found shelter at the barn. Ennis and Frank continued firing at the officers, striking Special Government Agent Marks in the shoulder, tearing the shirt from his body.

The Krueger brothers saw it differently. In their statement, three men stepped out of the car and began walking toward them. There was no mention of who they were or what they wanted. Suddenly shots came from the area where them men and car were located. Panicked, Ennis and Frank grabbed their rifles (which always accompanied them into the field to scare off crows) and returned fire as a means of protection. One of their bullets did strike Marks in the shoulder.

Next door to the Krueger farmstead lived a man named Vater. He was a trusted friend of the Krueger family and an upstanding citizen of Clark County. Ganes and the injured Marks ran to Vater's house for cover as shots continued. Regardless of who shot first, the battle of Withee had begun.

In Owen and Withee, Kidd and Rasmussen had great success organizing a posse: the population of recent immigrants offered many who were proud to be citizens of the United States of America. The area was chiefly Polish with large numbers of Lithuanians, Russians,



ENNIS KRUEGER



LESLIE KRUEGER

*from a Department of Justice wanted poster*

mately 1000 feet) and stopped opposite the field Frank and Ennis were working. The three government agents (Ganes, Marks, and Rasmussen) got out, leaving Kidd alone in the car.

According to a report presented by US Marshall Ganes, the three men walked to the field and hollered, "Come over here. I am a US Marshall and we have a warrant for your arrest." At that moment Ennis Krueger picked up

Finns, and Scandinavians also living in the county. There were few German families living in Clark County, so support for the Krueger family was minimal. Much to the misfortune of the Kruegers, a Polish picnic was held that day; the picnic joined the posse.

As it was elsewhere in the US during the First World War people of the Withee-Owen area were not tolerant of Germans, who were viewed as the enemy, no matter who they were. Adding fuel to the fire, the Krueger household received letters and packages from a German cousin on a regular basis. One package contained 440 rounds of ammunition, an extra magazine for a Colt .45, and an exotic weapon of the time, a .380 semi-automatic pistol.

The contents of the package were made public when the Owen Enterprise printed this headline:

**Krueger Situation Bad;  
Desire a War of their Own**

Evidently Preparing for War, Krueger family tries to stock up on firearms and ammunition.

By mid-afternoon, Ganes, Rasmussen, and Kidd had the posse organized on the east and north sides of the Krueger house to cut off escape to the woods and sawmill.

The posse began crossing the field when shots came from the barn. Returning fire, the posse began to shell the barn. Throughout the battle two local posse members Frank White and Emil Laneo were struck with bullets. To protect themselves from further gunfire they played dead for the entire afternoon as the battle waged on.

As evening began to fall the posse gained members sufficiently

to completely surround the house. The size of the posse was not only its strength, but also its weakness. Because very few of the men had any military background discipline was non-existent. Over 150 shells ripped through the Krueger home striking windows, cabinets, and possibly Deputy Agent at Withee, Harry Jensen.

Darkness set, and fallen posse members White and Laneo were rescued and given medical attention. Harry Jensen's help arrived too late; he bled to death on the Kruegers' front lawn.

Finally realizing that the only way to end this battle was to force the Kruegers from their barn, several members of the posse crawled into the hayloft and set the barn aflame.

Ennis and Lester escaped through the burning barn by boldly walking through the confused posse acting as members of the group. Frank continued to lay under a threshing machine in the barn, now screaming in fear of the fire and in pain from the bullet that had shattered his leg.

Mrs. Krueger ran into the barn to help. Using her skirt for bandages she bound Frank's leg and dragged him near the back porch. Vater convinced the armed crowd to stop shooting, allowing him to enter the barn. Mrs. Krueger and



*Looters and curiosity-seekers at the Krueger house. Photo originally published in A War of Their Own by Jerry Buss, Badger Books, 1998.*

Vater carried Frank to the road where the angry mob met them. Knocking Mrs. Krueger to the ground, the posse handcuffed and pummeled her. Frank, already in pain, was roughed up during his arrest. He spent the next weeks and months in jail.

Leslie escaped to Minnesota, working as farmer and on a Great Lakes ore ship. On a visit to Chippewa Falls he was identified. He was shipped to Camp Grant until the end of the war.

Ennis Krueger's fate is a great mystery. Leslie told of Ennis' travels beyond Minnesota, but the details are unknown. According to local Will Parker, a US Marshall charged through the loft demanding surrender. When Ennis rose up reaching for his gun, the US Marshall shot him through the forehead.

After several days and various stories it was agreed that a