

Jack Fitzgerald

By: Finian Casey

Ballston Spa, New York

My grandmother, Helen Casey (1927–2012), died when I was just six years old, but something I will always remember and cherish is that she told me I reminded her of the photos of her uncle Jack Fitzgerald. At that time, I did not understand the gravity of the story of Jack’s short life. I knew he had served in World War I and died in France. Even though she was born after this tragic event, I could tell that the stories of Jack and his bravery, heroism, and selflessness were ingrained into my grandmother’s childhood.

I did not understand fully, but I knew this was a great compliment, and it made my grandmother happy. The family legend of Jack Fitzgerald always seemed so distant. He was always so much older than me, and it seemed he was prepared for the war, something I thought only adults did. But now I find myself the same age as Jack when he died, and I look at his photographs, and I see someone who still looks like me. He also looks like a friend or a classmate, and I find myself dazed even to consider that any of us would have to make the decisions that Jack did.

The story of my great-granduncle John “Jack” J. Fitzgerald (1899–1918) is a testament to sacrifice and bravery. To learn more about Jack’s life, I wrote to my grandmother’s cousin, Dennis Fitzgerald. I also used my mother’s *Ancestry.com* account to locate Jack’s burial at St. Agnes Cemetery in Menands, New York. In addition, I consulted the *Veterans Administration*

Master Index, 1917-1940 database for this research and census records. I learned about the history of the Christian Brothers Academy and the 107th Infantry by reading about them online.

Born into a typical Irish-Catholic family in North Albany, New York, Jack was expected to follow the path of many children in his community and leave school early to join the workforce. However, his Aunt Ann, recognizing Jack's character and academic potential, declared "Someone in this family must rise up!" With her and her husband's financial support, Jack defied expectations and enrolled in the prestigious Christian Brothers Academy (CBA) in 1913.

At this time, Christian Brothers Academy was in downtown Albany on Lodge Street, a few blocks away from Jack's home. At CBA, Jack would have received a college preparatory education and military training with Zouave uniforms. Jack's choice to pursue further education, despite societal norms, is a powerful example of seizing opportunities and believing in one's potential. His determination to improve not just himself but also his community and country led him to enlist in the U.S. Army in 1917 when he was not yet eighteen. He chose to enlist alongside his neighborhood friends, Eddie Day and Jim Nelson, a common practice at the time. This decision marked a watershed in their lives, thrusting them into the chaos of World War I.

Their enlistment propelled the friends into the harsh realities of war. Jack and Eddie were assigned to Company C of the 107th Infantry, while Jim was assigned to a machine gun battery. Together, they embarked on a journey that would test their courage and resilience. The 107th Infantry, part of the U.S. First Army under General Pershing, faced the formidable Hindenburg Line, a complex network of fortifications intended to be impenetrable. Breaching this line would likely lead to the liberation of the rest of occupied France.

The tragic events of September 29th, 1918, were at the beginning of the final stage of the war. This was the Meuse–Argonne offensive and it demonstrated the harrowing and unforgiving nature of warfare. That day, Jack found himself in a trench between the French cities of St. Quentin and Cambrai; Jack and his fellow soldiers patiently awaited the order to advance towards the Hindenburg Line.

Once the order was given, despite the grave danger of enemy machine gun fire, Jack and his fellow soldiers pressed forward. Tragically, Jack was killed by a German sniper as he attempted to assist a wounded soldier. At the time of his death, he was a month away from his nineteenth birthday. The *Veterans Administration Master Index, 1917-1940*, indicates that Edward A. Day died on September 27, 1918, while John Joseph Fitzgerald and James Joseph Nelson died on September 29, 1918. These soldiers were all from Albany, New York, and I do not doubt they are Eddie, Jack, and Jim from the family story.

I also discovered that Jack's date of birth is listed as October 30, 1898, in this index. Did he lie about his age so that he could enlist? This discovery makes Jack's story even more heartbreaking and awe-inspiring. What an incredible individual he must have been.

The sacrifices made by Eddie, Jack, Jim, and their fellow soldiers serve as a reminder of the price of the freedoms that we, as Americans, enjoy today. The willingness of Jack and every other Entente soldier who served in WWI to confront potentially fatal danger head-on demonstrates the sacrifices these men and women made to protect these freedoms. I am eighteen years old, and I have learned several valuable lessons from Jack's story that resonate with me.

Firstly, perseverance and determination are essential in pursuing one's goals. Despite facing many obstacles as well as overwhelming societal expectations, Jack remained undeterred in his pursuit of further education and later, in his commitment to defend his country. Secondly, Jack's story demonstrates the significance of family support and motivation. Without the encouragement and financial assistance of his Aunt Ann and her husband, Jack likely would not have had the opportunity to pursue further education, which subsequently may have made him unable to enlist in the army. Their unwavering support for him serves as a reminder of the impact that familial connections can have on determining one's future. Lastly, Jack's sacrifice has encouraged me to fully appreciate the freedoms I enjoy and how essential it is to appreciate each moment. His courage on the battlefield serves as a powerful reminder of the selflessness exhibited by those who have and continue to serve our country.

These lessons can be easily applied to my own life. Jack's story has inspired me to approach the various difficulties I face with resilience and perseverance and to cherish the support of family members. I was reminded to never take for granted the freedoms that others, both today and throughout our history, have fought and died for. I will see that Jack's memory lives on as a reminder of the enduring spirit of courage and selflessness that continues to shape our nation and communities today.

The images below are from the scrapbook of my grandmother, Helen Casey.



My Uncle

John (Jack) Fitzgerald
(1899 - 1918)

TWO MORE ALBANY WAR HEROES GIVEN MILITARY FUNERAL

Mgr. Looney at St. Joseph's Lauds Privates McGraw And Fitzgerald.

Military and religious services were conducted at the funerals of Privates William J. McGraw and John J. Fitzgerald in St. Joseph's church and at St. Agnes' cemetery yesterday morning. The body of McGraw was buried in a plot adjacent to that in which Private Edward A. Day, McGraw's boyhood companion was laid to rest.

The Rt. Rev. Michael J. Looney, pastor, was celebrant at the two services assisted by Fathers McCaffery, Krueger and Haeberl. Monsignor Looney addressed the dead soldiers, assuring they gave their lives as thousands of other American youths did for the maintenance of democracy. The church was filled with relatives, friends and former service men.

Private Fitzgerald's funeral took place at 8 o'clock, and as the body was being carried from the church by former service men, the McGraw funeral arrived. The hearse and floral squad that accompanied the McGraw body stood at attention while Private Fitzgerald was being borne from the church.

Hearers at the Fitzgerald funeral were John Walter, Thomas McManis, M. George, John Hoody, William Eusebio, Thomas McGuire, M. McCaskey, J. Barletta, Samuel Cassese and M. McCann.

Walter Nathan, Charles Walsh, Andrew Patterson, David Danahy, Daniel Patton, George McVernon, Owen McCaskey, Frank Quirk, William Bradley, Jacob Marx, Joseph Alberts and John Kennedy were no hearers at the funeral of Private McGraw.

A squad of soldiers from the Waterfront Arsenal fired a volley and flags were flown by Edward Rosenberg at the cemetery.

The funeral of Private James J. Nelson will take place this morning at 9 o'clock at the home of his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Daniel J. Nelson, 48 North Lawrence street, and later at St. Joseph's church. Relatives will be hearers.

Louis W. Oppenheimer, pastor vice commander of Admiral Coghlan post, Veterans of Foreign Wars, asks post members and that of John Coghlan auxiliary, to meet at North Lawrence street and Broadway at 8:30 o'clock and form an honor escort from the home to the church. A firing squad and bugler will accompany the body to St. Agnes cemetery.

THE FRONT—Albany and the "Big Parade" of the American Legion and Gold Star mothers William W. Long is shown at the front of the parade at Troy yesterday.

DELEGATION OF GOLD STAR MOTHERS



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