

#2 Lester Johnson & the American Volunteer Ambulance Corp – Part 2

I became very intrigued with Lester Johnson, the volunteer ambulance driver, who was the topic of my last post. I wanted to try to find out more about him.

I discovered in the library burial file that Lester's mother, Dora B. Jacobson Johnson, died on May 13, 1913. According to her obituary published in the Kinsley *Graphic*, she had been born in Bergen, Norway, on February 25, 1873. She came to America with her parents when she was 7 years old. They settled in Wisconsin where she would come to marry a Danish immigrant, Peter H. Johnson, in 1890. Lester, was born in Marshfield, Wisconsin on March 27, 1893.

A few years after Lester was born, Mrs. Johnson contracted tuberculosis. Seeking a better climate for her condition, the family tried living in Albuquerque and the Ozarks before coming to Kinsley in 1903. When Dora died on May 13, 1913, her daughter Juanita (age 22), son Vernon (age 18 and just graduating from high school), and 1 1/2 year old baby Richard were at her side. Lester was not there as he was a sophomore at the University of Kansas.

We can only wonder if it were his mother's long illness that led Lester to pursue a pre-med course. Reference Specialist Mindy Babarskis of the University of Kansas Spencer Research Library kindly scanned pages from the Jayhawker 1915 yearbook for me. They record Lester graduation from KU and membership in two honorary fraternities, *Acacia* and *Nu Sigma Nu*. Lester's KU graduation picture accompanies this post. Ms Babarskis did say that he did not continue to pursue a degree in medicine at KU.

What we do know, is 18 months after graduation, he became a volunteer ambulance driver in France.

