

George S. Crenko

The difficulties faced by soldiers trying to adjust to returning home have been known as long as there have been battles. It is only in modern times that there are therapies for treating our veterans. George S. Crenko did not have that type of treatment available to him.

George S. Crenko was a pilot during World War I, a highly dangerous occupation. He served in the 94th Aero Squadron alongside the fabled Eddie Rickenbacker, and the daring Quentin Roosevelt (the youngest son of Theodore Roosevelt), and other notable flyers. At one point during his service, Crenko was pinned down in No Man's Land and gassed for a day and a half before being rescued.

After receiving his discharge in 1919, he was granted vocational training by the Army. He attended a college of photography in the Chicago area. He moved to Billings in 1923, and bought a photographic studio in the Babcock building in 1924 after its owner died. There he made photographic portraits for families and businessmen and did camera work for print pieces as well as processing film for prints. He was active in the community with the American Legion.

But Crenko still experienced the aftereffects of his war experience. In early 1926, he left his studio in the hands of colleague Ida Parsons, and left for Helena to receive some unspecified treatment at Fort Harrison for his "infirmities". He remained there for over three months before returning to Billings.

Seemingly good as new, Crenko moved his studio to the corner of North 27th Street and 1st Avenue North. The new location was described as modern, inviting and attractive, and Crenko expected to do both portrait and commercial photography in this location.

Only eight months later, in February of 1927, Crenko "suddenly became insane" according to a *Gazette* article. Without giving much detail, the article



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relates that he created a disturbance on the corner of Broadway and Montana Avenue that caused him to be arrested by the police and hauled off to the county jail. This happened on a Friday night. On Saturday afternoon, he was given a hearing before the district court judge. Crenko was determined to be insane, and was committed to the state hospital. On Sunday, County Sheriff Stone Matlock drove him to Warm Springs.

A month later, his studio was sold to another photographer. Crenko disappeared from the Billings scene.

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Billings Gazette, "Photo Shop to Close for Remodeling and Will Open on April 1", March 27, 1927

Billings Gazette, "Shell-Shocked Veteran Suddenly Loses Mind", February 26, 1927

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Billings Gazette, "Crenkos Art Studio (advertisement)", March 29, 1925