

From Houston to Brest (LWR)

On the Monday, May 5, 2018, we turned in our cots, cleaned up everywhere, and marched out only to return 3 hours later. There were no trains or cars to take us out. L and M Companies were the 7th section and so we returned. We made up bunks on the floor without blankets. We were allowed in town until 11 PM after policing the whole regimental camp. I went to a crowd of shows and had trout for dinner. Then it was back to camp. I did hate to leave Houston for I had made good friends here here and had some great times. But duty calls. I slept quite well on my hard bunk and felt quite fit.

Tuesday May 7, 1918.

Breakfast was brought over from the cars and we did another clean up. On the parade ground, Col. Davis (he has been promoted twice) inspected us and away we marched. It was a very hot day. Our uniforms are of wool and we carried 50 pound packs. The 2 1/2 miles was quite a walk. But, our cars were pulled up and we were ready for the ride. The train was made up of 14 pullmans and tourist cars. There were seven for L Co and seven for M Co., one for officers, two baggage cars for the cooks and one boxcar for food. We piled in , three to a section.

We pulled thru Houston over the M&KF, staying in the I & G.N. depot a couple of hours and we saw the last of Houston at 12:54 AM . I was corporal of the guard in charge of the car from 11 AM to 6 PM. I Posted three relief guards, did a lot of reading and wrote a couple of letters. Meals were fine -. Hot and filling. The YMCA had a lot of magazines in the cars and I also had a few. At most of the towns everyone was at the stations to greet us. I went to bed in the lower berth between real sheets. Joe Carroll and I shared the bunk. I had tried to be in with Louie but was made left guide, 1st Platoon at last moment. The country here all fairly level and well farmed. I drew full pay \$29.50.

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Wed. May 8, 1918

Today we passed through Texas into Oklahoma and then into Arkansas. We got out and exercised in Paris ,Tx and in Ft. Smith Ark. We hiked several miles in each town. Had a fine time and lots of fun. Food was very very good featuring warm meals. I wrote letters, cards and read.. Toward the end of the day we went thru the Ozarks The country is very interesting and the mountains were beautiful. Roses were thrown to us from everywhere. All of us had flowers.

Thurs. May 9. 1918

Passed into Mo. this AM and the land changed in appearance greatly. About 50 miles from St. Louis, our train hit and killed a cow . Our car then pulled a drawbar so we were switched from the 2nd coach to the last or 17th coach. At St. Louis we detrained, marched to the YMCA, had showers and those of us in our coach had to go back because the Lt thought that we would have to change cars.. We did not and we were marched back in time to fall in with the company and return to the train. The draw bar was replaced but with a bum knuckle so we were left at the end of the train, a caboose back of us. At last we crossed into Ill. It sure was a wonderful feeling to be in our own state. Land - people - both. We cheered and cheered and cheered. Road in the caboose until after taps. Was on guard all night. Crossed into Indiana.

Fri. May 10, 1918

In Indiana it sure turned cold right about midnight and this AM was really cold. We were out for exercise at Marion, Indiana, marching thru town. Then back onto the train.. In time we passed into Ohio and again paraded for exercise in Delphos. Quite a place. At all our stops we were met by people and had a great deal of fun. Back on the train, I spent most of the time in the caboose keeping warm. We were 6 cars of M Co and 1 car of officers from our own cars and men so we stayed to ourselves. It was cold and we passed into Cleveland after dark. It was one maze of trestles sometimes two deep. Over rivers, streets, etc. We had a view of the town

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from a deep valley up to a high hill. The main section of Cleveland seems to be on the top of a hill. The light showed up fine and we were very interested. Passed thru the residential district and we hollered and whistled while people waved and cheered. We slept very cold and passed thru Penna.

Sat. May 11, 1918

Was awakened by a tap on the window. Stuck my head out. We were in Buffalo and Red Cross nurses dressed in pale blue and white were passing out cigarettes and chocolate bars, also post cards. They sure treated us fine. Our coach was still at the end and the day gradually warmed up.. At Rochester we paraded with belts and rifles. At Syracuse the cook car had to be reset on new trucks due to flat wheels. We paraded a long while and then our cars were in the depot over 2 hours. The people were good. The Red Cross girls kept coming up and down with smokes, stamped cards, gum, sandwiches, candy, etc. I have seen much good done by the Red Cross and the way people are so I gave \$1.00 into the fund. The response to us by the people is great. At Utica NY we again had exercise. Cook car again was put on new trucks. Stayed in the yards about 5 hours. Our car was put on the other end and we were again the last coach. All the rest had fun in the depot but our usual hard luck followed us. Went to bed after that. On quite a few towns we went right down the center of the streets and that was really interesting. We all had plenty to eat and lots of rest and exercise and sleep. We have been on the following roads and still do not know where we are going. I&GN, T&BVR, AT&SF, StL &SF, TStL & W, NYC&StL, NYO&W. so where are we? Read a while.

Newbeiser and Lang were informed they will be busted for playing cards with privates. Joe Carroll was caught with whisky. Lt. Goodwin told me he wanted me as Company Clerk as Halverson is not up to scratch. I told him I could handle it, I knew, but preferred to be a line corporal. He went away. Now I understand that the officers had a meeting and I am now Company Clerk. Something I truly do not want to do. Was taken because of my record and of being accurate. I want a chance to fight and work up, not to run a typewriter and a pen. Not happy about this turn of events.

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Sun. May 12, 1918

We were on the Hudson all morning and the scenery was most beautiful. On one side the Palisades and on the other ——— next two lines are unreadable).

The high rocks had many little waterfalls. Then before we knew it, we were in N.J. New camp, Merrett (or Merritt) . But we kept going until we dove into a great tunnel and stopped on the other side of it. We were in Jersey City, I guess. Cars climbed up and down high steep hills. There after a very very long wait in a depot and then we detrained and marched thru a depot onto a ferry, the Syracuse. Then we were in the harbor. It was misty and a low fog hung over everything. We excitedly saw and called each others' attention to the sights we were able to see. . We went under three bridges, one being the Brooklyn Bridge. They were gigantic. Even though I had seen many of the sights in movies, they were really before me and I could not help being thrilled. We skirted along the water front of N.Y.C. and all the tops of the high buildings were up in the clouds, only a hazy outline of "Lady Liberty" was in view. Battery Park was a very pretty place. I saw also for the first time REAL ocean going boats The camaphlage (sic) which I had always thought was black & white, I discovered was many colors with very little object in design. We saw transports and freighters. I also saw the British and Cuban flags over some ships. To me, the weirdest were the ferry boats which were so clumsy that their big side paddles seemed to roll along the surface of the water. Our one disappointment was that it being Sunday no traffic was on the river. But better luck later maybe. At last we landed in Long Island City and boarded a Long Island RR train. On one side was the 110 Sanitary. Train of the 35th Div. On the other the 319 Artillery of the 82 Div. They left first and in about 3 hrs. an engine was found & we left, finally Our speed was good. I saw the electric engine from the subway. All along our route the people cheered and cheered.

I am now Company Clerk. I am not happy about this.

We arrived at 11 PM to what seemed to be our destination and hiked down a stone road with barracks on each side. We found ours and there

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were not enough cots and no lights so I bunked on the floor until I heard someone looking for me. They seemed to need me in the office. I jumped in bed with Kovitz and they did not find me. I got a fair night's sleep.

Tues. May 14, 1918

We received a lot of equipment today including steel helmets, razors etc. Now I am outfitted. I also have 120 rounds of ammunition. Got to the big canteen twice but the prices are very high. Wrote a letter or two and got nabbed for more work in the office. Camp Upton is a large place and very dirty. Holds most of the draftsmen from NY and NJ.

Wed., May 15, 1918

Packed up again. Now carrying A. equipment and 1 blanket. 10 bullets & overcoats. Spent the day working and traveling over to Dvi HQ. I was still not happy about being Company Clerk. Halverson was glad he's getting off of it. We lined up before dark. K and L were the last Cos so we got to clean up all the regiment's barracks. Rations were passed out, 2 sandwiches, 1 can of salmon to every 3 men, hardtack and cookies. At 9 PM we went to the Y to see movies. Then to the mess-hall where we had coffee and hardtack. I was sent to Maj. Hart to tell him we had rations. He had a detail come and get them. Sent two men to the Base Hospital at midnight.

Thurs. May 16, 1918

At 2:30 AM we fell in, had roll call and away we marched. France may have a lot of shell holes but the road we were on was bad enough. We were carrying full packs and were wearing our overcoats. It was pitch dark and we had all we could do to keep from tripping. A train was waiting and in we piled. We were one man to a seat and we managed to squeeze in and go to sleep. All went fine. When we reached Long Island City, we lined up and marched onto a ferry. It was a mob scene, but still room for us. Gen'l Bell was on our train. Down the bay we went to the docks. This time the sun was shining and I saw New York in real splendor. All kinds of boats were in sight, but we went right up to the transports on the Jersey side. The

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“Fatherland” was there all camafloged (sic) It was even hard to see her guns She surely is a whopper. We hoped to get on it but did not. Unloaded and marched thru some great loading piers. Here the Red Cross gave us coffee and biscuits. Wrote three cards telling of safe arrival. The Red Cross will mail the cards from NY when we get to France

After about 3 hours at 11:36 AM I stepped onto a ship. It was the Mt. Vernon, formerly the German liner, The “Kronprinzessen Cecilia”. We stayed around the gun deck forward and then were sent into the hold that was called Equipment Room A. On one nail we hung our packs and overcoats and rifles. About 10 sq. in. was allowed to each of us.

Photo # NH 45742 USS Mount Vernon at Brest, France, 5 May 1918



Over 550 of us put our things there. Then it was back onto the deck. Each of us was given a tag to wear . On it was our bunk number, troop space number and mess sitting also when we were allowed to sleep. Louie and I roamed around. I was a white tag, 4th setting, space 4, bunk 130 9 AM to 4

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PM. for sleeping. Bummed around the board, found my space etc. At 4:30 PM they chased us all below and when we got on deck again we were out to sea. Had our last look at New York Line and away it went. We joined the "Agamemnon"*, a sister ship to ours and were on our way. I foresaw a lot of trouble with equipment, as already men were crawling over and under, knocking many things down, so I pulled mine out. That night I slept on the deck as most of our Company. did. The ship mounted 4 5" guns on it. I ran into Gordon Shilling. I went to Crerar School with him back in 1909-1911.

Fri. May 17, 1918

The sailors woke us up very early on so we could get out of the way as they had to swab the decks. So we went down and washed and shaved, used salt water and believe me salt water was some stuff to use. Had a fair breakfast. We filed in and there was just enough standing room between the tables for 2 men back to back. There were 10 at a table and tin dishes. One large container held the food. At each setting when all were present a whistle blew and we started eating. About 1400 ate at one mess. I found the man I shared bunks with was a cook. He cooked nights so I let him sleep days while I slept nights. We had wash water and rooms but they were fed with salt water, which was by no means very pleasant to use. I felt quite giddy all day but was not really sick. Read or talked. Found it better to stay amid ship as my stomach did not stand the bouncing well. We were allowed no lights at dark so turn in early. No white hats or caps or smoking.

Sat. May 18, 1918

Was up about 7 AM. The bunks were fair. Pipes ran from ceiling to floor and four layers of canvas were stretched between them so we slept one above the other. There were about 200 bunks in our section, some 500 square ft. of flooring. The steady jar of the engines I felt for a while. We all slept in half dress. The day was bright but the sea heavy and our ship rolled quite a bit. So did the others. I was found by Sgt. Kissack and went to work all day in the Parlor near Gen'l Bell's Hdqts. No chance to get our sandwiches for dinner as certain reports had to be typewritten. We did manage

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to see some of the movies shown down in the mess hall. Had to stop working at dark. Could not stay up when below. Still light headed but could stay in bed. Sighted one ship away south of us.

Sun. May 19, 1918

My first Sunday at sea. The Y.M.C.A. man opened a couple of cases of books and magazines and the boys, most of whom were getting restless, really settled in. Also he started them writing letters which will go back on this ship.

They got us to working on the reports again and no chance to go to church services which were held below us in the open space of the mess hall. However, I did hear a little and the sailors sure have some chaplain. Missed dinner but had supper. Worked until dark. Felt a little sick. Most of our boys slept on the deck and not many below in the day time cause the places had to be cleaned.

Mon. May 20, 1918

Again I worked all day. The food was not wonderful but was substantial. For dinner we got sandwiches, 2 each of sausage. Finished our reports. Every day in the mess hall they have had a concert and movies. Managed to fix up my belly and so let fine but could not stay below. We only shaved 3 times a week while on ship.

Tues. May 21, 1918

Laid around all day. Got a dollar's worth of candy from the canteen thru a sailor. Gave him two bits. Wrote a letter home and posted it with the Y.M.C. A man. The day was fine. Ate my sandwiches with relish. Wrote a letter and read. (We) were in sub zone now but really didn't mind it.

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Wed. May 22, 1918

Bout the same. Watched for our convoy all day but no luck. Saw big schools of large fish., passed 3 ships in the distance. Read and ate. Felt fine, but missed candy. Saw movies as usual.

Thurs. May 23, 1918

Convoys arrived. 5 of them and beautiful little dashing ships they were. All camaflogged (sic) and low. It interested us for the remainder of the day. They had guns, depth bombs, etc.

Fri. May 24, 1918

Were told we would sight land today. All hung along rail except those who had to take down bunks and swab below. The land appeared as a dull blue gray cloud and slightly hove in view. Saw quite a few ships, an airplane etc. Excitement was flying wide. We entered a channel between high steep hills and under our own power turned into a bay or harbor and there before us was the city of Brest. Over 40,000 troops were in the harbor and we hoped to be unloaded at once, but we were not. We waited, hoped and wished. But only could see the town better using field glasses. We put our bunks up again, or at least they who slept in them did.

An order for special forms and information came and Van Pelt, Hal, Gross and I worked all night to get them out. A fireman brought us some beef and bread and coffee. The harbor was beautiful at night. We hoped to get off tomorrow. Still there were lots of troops there to be unloaded.

Sat. May 25, 1918

We spent hoping to get off. We watched other troops unload and saw airships -- captive balloons and our planes. Subs and warships came in and out. Had meals, a couple of concerts, and movies. Put our beds back up, wrote and read. Yesterday just as we dropped anchor, the band struck up the French National Anthem and then many other songs. No work tonight.

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Sun. May 26, 1918

We waited after clearing all troop spaces, with full packs and lolled around on the starboard upper deck until after noon. Had sandwiches and at last a double decker boat drew up. On this our whole battalion and the 124 MG Bat. and in a seemingly long time we landed. The first word from a French person I heard was in answer to the price of oranges and it was "ten cents". So English is known here. We marched thru a section of Brest. Up a long steep section of hills at last arriving at Plamondon Barracks. But the place was crowded and so they put us in a field about 1 1/2 mile away known as Plot #15. No fences around but the ground was divided with sod fences which must be hundreds of years old. The dress of the people was very ancient, including wooden shoes, knitted wear and the men wore black hats with ribbon streamers. The houses were old, made of mud with tile roofs of red. The barn for stock etc was all in the same building but with different doors. Our eats were fair but no candy. Lots of fellows got drunk because of being able to get so much wine.

Mon. May 22, 1918

I bunked with Greeder. Up in a cold crisp AM. Laid around quite a bit. Also bummed out around the country. Saw lots of strange sights. The wagons were two wheeled and high. 2 horses pull them, one behind the other with a person leading them.

They got me to work as Co. Clerk and Hal and I worked all day. The Y.M.C.A. brought a canteen of cookies and smokes and I bought a lot of cookies. Got out of the barracks with a detail but had no time to buy candy. Tried to get on a detail to go to Brest for some reason, we don't know what, but no luck. Wrote a letter and turned it in to be censored.

Tues. May 28, 1918

Laid around and did quite a bit of Co. Clerk work. Bum eats. My letter came back and I had to rewrite it. Wanted to Hike out a while but the guards held us in. Well, we had arrived and what would come, would come.