

Dear Ernest and Ruby:

This is an answer to your letter asking about something of my army life and this is what I remember.

I enlisted in the United States Army World War I February 26, 1918 when I was 23 years old and was discharged March 21, 1919. I served in Company E, 130th Infantry 33rd Division.

There were several men with me from Sac County and we were sent to Camp Dodge, Des Moines, Iowa. After all the preliminaries we were sent to Camp Logen, Texas about the 15th of April. We were put in the National Guard Company E, 130th Infantry, 33rd Division. From here we were sent to Camp Upton, New Jersey and then sent to New York. On the 10th of May we sailed from New York to Europe landing at Brest, France, May 16th. We rested there about a week. Our squad was given a French Automatic Rifle called Shaw Shay. Now we were called the Automatic Squad. This gun worked like a machine gun only it did not shoot as fast. It had two bipods to hold up the barrel. We got three magazines that held fifty rounds of ammunition each. The ammunition came in canvas belts with slings so I could hang them around my neck. They were called Bandoleers.

A man named Ralph Spink was the gunner and I was the lead carrier. I carried 480 rounds of ammunition, my back pack, rifle and three magazines. When in battle I laid on my back beside the gunner and would fill the magazines as the gunner emptied them.

We went into the front lines at midnight. This town was called Albert which is right on the north edge of France, I think.

Our front lines were on one side of the town and the Germans were on the other side. There was a railroad track cut through a hill where our trenches were. That bank was between 25 to 30 feet high. In order to get down town we had to dig steps in the side of the bank. Then it was down hill to town. That same night we Automatic men were taken down town on an out post which was a factory that had been blown to pieces. A few bricks were still standing which was about half of the wall. We were to try to drive the snipers out of town. We were very quiet and had to talk to each other in whispers.

One day the Sargeant came down and said we should go back to the trenches and the Americans were doing to shell the town to try to drive out the snipers. Our Corporal said "I guess you are right". We started up the hill but we didn't walk one behind the other but walked staggered. Then two bullets flew past my head. If they had been six inches closer they would have gone through my

head. I turned to look back and two more bullets flew by my head. Then we all hit the ground. We laid there a little while, got up, ran a little way, then hit the ground again. We repeated this until we got to the top of the hill. We didn't take the steps we just jumped and slid down the hill. I landed on my feet so hard it felt like the bones of my legs went through the bottom of my feet. I fell forwards and my knees hit the railroad track. I couldn't get up. My buddies got me up on my feet and walked me around awhile until I could walk again. That night we went down town to our outpost.

We were in No Man's Land for two days and two nights. The British relieved us. They came in making a lot of noise. Our Corporal told them as well as us to grab our stuff and let's get out of here. We hardly got to the trenches. The Germans got most of the squad. On our way out of the trenches the men started to argue saying "Where were you. I didn't see you out there". That's the way it went for awhile but our squad didn't say a word. All at once the Lieutenant said "Shut up". I don't want to hear another word. I know who was out there and who wasn't. You Automatic men sure did fine."

We walked over a hill called Dead Man's Hill. It had been shelled so much there was one shell hole right beside another one. We were on our way to another front and that was the Meuse River and the Argonne Forest Offensive. When we crossed the river the Germans were trying to hit the bridge with artillery shells. They were dropping them in the middle of the river about 175 feet on both sides of the bridge. The water flew up in the air higher than the big cottonwood trees. They didn't hit the bridge while we were crossing it.

We were on one front for 45 days straight either in the front lines or back in support. We carried machine gun ammunition to the front lines in broad day light. The Germans were trying to hit us with artillery shells. First one would drop on one side of us and the next one was closer. We just got through the valley then they were dropping the shells in our path.

One time when we were in the front lines I was on guard. When it was daylight they brought us breakfast. It was foggy. We could see the German's Observation Balloons in the air but we didn't think they could see us so we ate breakfast on top of the trenches. I told my Corporal, "I think I will go to eat". He said, "No, Klindt, you better stay there". I said, "Here is my mess kit you bring me something." He said "Oh, Klindt, go get your own food". I was the last one in the line. They just gave me my eats then the Germans started to shell us. I jumped in the trench right there. All I got to eat was a half slice of bread, a cup of coffee and a cup of grounds. That was only enough to keep a person alive. After the shooting was over I walked back to my post. The Germans had dropped a shell where I would have been standing guard. My Corporal said, "Klindt, I am sure glad I let you get your own food." I said, "I am too Corporal".

Dear Ernest and Ruby:

I am writing to let you know that I have that letter finished about my army life. I have one hundred percent service connected disability. Elaine will type it and make copies and I will send you one.

Elaine and Bob are going to England and they asked Estella to go along with them. I told Estella "For goodness sake, go, Estella". So she will take that letter along and have Elaine make four copies. I hope that letter will explain to you about my army life. Anyway, you will know it will be on its way. I know Elaine will not get it done before she goes to England. I can remember a lot more about the army that happened but it is impossible to write it all.

I was close to the kitchen and they weighed me. I weighed 125 pounds. On the farm I weighed 160-165 the year round so you can see why I am always hungry.

Now I am going to write about the Germans. They used a shell hole for the backhouse. As they were pushed they would throw the bread they had left into the backhouse. We came along hooked the bread out of that shell hole. We cut the crust off and ate the bread. We were very glad to have it. Now I will tell you some things about when I was a little boy six years old and in the first grade.

We lived close to the school about 20 roads away. Sometimes I was the first one there and sometimes I would be the last one. One morning I was the first one and I went to the backhouse. When I looked in away I ran back into the school house and said "Teacher, Teacher, there a dog in the backhouse. She went out and I was close behind her. The dog was dead. She took it by the tail and pulled it out. At noon we would play "pump, pump, pull away", if you don't come I'll pull you away. Then the big boys would put me on their shoulder and carry me through so I never got caught. One day I was the last one there. Everybody was in their seats when I came in and they all started to laugh. I thought "What was the matter?". I had my overalls on wrong side out. My oldest brother took me out in the hall and so Hans changed my pants. That same year we had a basket social. I sat close to the Auctioneer and the cashier. Both of these men knew my father and mother were very poor. Finally I bid three cents on a basket. The Auctioneer looked at the cashier and nodded his head yes. The man said "sold to this young man". That basket belonged to a young girl named Edna Stocks. We sat facing the crowd and ate our lunch. It was very good and I really enjoyed it.

Well, Ernest, I am going to quit but I will tell you another incident in the army.

One night we were hiking. We finally stopped and slept in an old barn. I was dead tired. Some of the men in my Squad were going out to get something to eat. I had a \$10.00 bill of American money. I gave it to the men and told them to bring some for me if they found something. Spend the whole wad! No luck they didn't find anything. There was a bee hive but it was empty. We went to sleep very hungry.

Another time we were hiking. We saw a stock of round loaves of bread. It was just like a grain stack. Our Squad broke ranks. I grabbed a gallon of syrup and the other men grabbed bread. When we stopped we had a feast. For once we got filled up and did that ever feel good not to be hungry.

Ernest, these are all true stories and I remember everything very well.

We went out on No Man's Land one night to put up barb wire entanglements. We were just ready to start to work when the Germans started to send over high explosives. These shells exploded in the air and the shrapnel flies in all directions. I ran behind some very tall bushes and tried to find the lowest spot on the ground. I heard a piece of shrapnel a long way off whistling through the air headed right for me. I closed my eyes, bit my teeth together, and it came crashing through the branches and hit right in front of my head and threw dirt against my helmet. That was the end of that project.

We went to our trenches -- 18 miles. The next day we walked 20 miles and the next 24 miles. There were an awful lot of men who couldn't take it so they dropped out. I stayed with it but I had all I could take. I couldn't walk a straight line any more. Sometimes my buddies would carry me. We saw some French man with 6 horses on a big wagon stuck in the mud and where the German's made a direct hit on a piece of artillery guns. It was blown all to pieces. One day our artillery put over a million dollar barrage. They started one morning and kept it up all day. There wasn't a pause between any shell. Towards evening it started to taper off. With those artillery shells you would hear whistling going through the air, then a boom way off in the distant. Those shells that are going to drop close by you, you just heard them whistle and they were there. When we would hear one automatically hit the ground and the shell is there too.

Our water boy was hit with one. Some of the boys went to see him. They said he was hit so bad he looked like a bunch of jelly -- but I didn't go to see him. That is what goes on in war. There is a lot of flying steel just about all the time. They say if anyone was in the Argonne Forest before the war it was as dark as night, but after the war there were just a few stumps standing. But it has grown up again.

We hadn't had our shoes, leggings, or stockings off for at least 45 days, so when we happened to be supporting the Australians we took off our shoes, leggings and stockings and did that ever feel good.

Now I have a little to tell about our last battle of the war for us but I didn't stay until it was all over. We were making a drive. We took thousands of prisoners. I was gassed very bad. When you run into that you didn't breathe until you put on your gas mask. I always said I would go until I dropped and that is what I did. When I came to I was in a hospital in Vichy France. I don't know how long I was there but the war was over when I got out.

It really felt good not to have cooties, to have clean clothes and not to hear noise from guns or shrapnels flying through the air.

I arrived back in the United States.

Several year later I heard that my good friend, Charles Schnuckel, lived in Odebolt. We were pals all through the army. I went to see him and he was very surprised to see me. He said the last time he saw me was when he saw me lying in the mud. He said then that if this man is going to die he is going to die on dry ground, so he pulled me out of the mud. I asked Charley if he was sure it was me. He said, "Yes, I know it was you".

He asked me how many battle stars I got and I said one. He said he got six and I should have had just as many. There were a lot of things our company did but didn't get credit for.

This is just a little bit of what I saw and did in World War I. I am on 100% disability compensation so there is much more to tell about battles.

Sincerely

Henry C. Klindt