

Facts on Experience of World War I as written by Percy G. Tripp

I was a few months under twenty one years of age on January 26th, 1918, when I enlisted in Portland, Maine in the aviation section of the Signal Corps of the United States Army and was sent with other recruits to Fort Slocum, N. Y., where I was sworn into the service on February first. After remaining at Fort Slocum about a month, I was transferred to Camp Hancock, Ga., arriving there on March 6th, and was soon after reassigned to a motor mechanics regiment.

I had been at Camp Hancock about one week, when at one of the company formations our Captain told us that any one who wanted to go overseas could volunteer for transfer to a branch of the service which was soon to be sent across. I volunteered among others, and with about 25 recruits from my company, was sent north a day or two after.

We arrived at Camp Merritt, N. J. on March 6th where I was immediately assigned to Co. F., 38th U. S. Infantry. On the second night after my arrival, at about 3 o'clock, my outfit entrained and was taken to Hoboken, arriving there in the early morning. Quite a crowd of people were out to greet us and as we marched through the streets of the city to the pier where a U. S. transport awaited us, we were heartily cheered.

At the pier, we immediately went aboard the transport U.S.S. Mont Vernon, which a little later in the day moved out into the harbor. The next day at about 2 o'clock in the afternoon we started on our voyage to France. There were about 7,000 soldiers on board the transport, and as the ship passed down the harbor apparently every craft in sight, from the large steamships to the smaller tugs and sailing vessels, gave us a shrill salute of hearty cheer from those on board, while the good natured crowd of soldiers responded with answering cheers. With most of the boys there was a certain gravity of manner, however, which tinged the excitement with thoughtfulness. It was not, I am sure, the effect of thinking of the future for themselves, but rather the thought of the folks at home.

During the voyage, we were kept busy standing guard duty, washing down the decks and other light tasks. Some of the newest recruits, myself among them, took advantage of the offer of some of the older army men in the outfit to increase our knowledge of drilling and company formations. We ate in the large dining room of the ship and as our transport was under American management, our food was good and sufficient. Details were made up each 24 hours to watch for submarines. As a safety precaution at night all lights were extinguished except at the foot of stairways and under decks, where only blue lights were permitted. All matches, luminous faced watches and cigarette lighters had been taken from the men when we came aboard to be returned when the voyage was over. During the day amusements were provided such as moving pictures in the large dining hall and the band concerts by our regimental band on the upper deck in the afternoon.

In company with the Mont Vernon were three other ships, composing the fleet taking the third division, U. S. Army to France. Three days out of Brest, as I remember, the ships were met by a

number of U.S. Destroyers which convoyed us through the danger zone into port.

We arrived at Brest on March 13, here, quartered in the old Napoleon barracks, we stayed about three days assisting in landing the army supplies.

We were then taken in box cars to a small town in eastern France called Couprè, where we were stationed with Co. E of our regiment until May 30th, drilling and learning the French methods of fighting and occasionally taking long hikes about the country, in other words going through the usual grind of the school of the soldier.

The drill grounds of some of the other companies of the 38th were a short distance from us and we frequently marched over to their camp to practice drilling with them. During the six weeks we were at Couprè we drilled eight hours a day and practiced regularly on the rifle range, making us recruits into soldiers qualified, I believe, to drill, parade or fight alongside of the older service men of the company.

At Chaumont, if the memory serves rightly, as to place, General Pershing reviewed our regiment, and on May 30th we entrained and started for the front. We were a few days on the train in box cars, detraining at a town called Montmirail, about 45 miles from Chateau Thierry. At Montmirail, we learned for the first time how critical the situation at the front was considered, and I may add that here we got our first knowledge that this was where we were going.

It was well into the day when we detrained at Montmirail. In the area beside the train we stood at ease while our camp kitchen was unloaded and chow prepared for the company. About us was the evidence of the critical situation at the front. We could hear the distant booming of the heavy artillery away towards the east, while in our immediate vicinity French army officers were hurrying about in their automobiles amid the seeming confusion of army transports, some loaded with French soldiers, others with army supplies and ammunition, interspersed with light field artillery, all being sorted out and sent on their way to the front.

While we were waiting for chow, for we had had no rations since the night before, our captain took occasion to address us upon the serious side of the war we were about to enter upon, for it was thought that the Germans were about to launch their great drive to break the allied lines, and that we were going into action with the French troops immediately. I remember our captain told us that we were soon to see the side of war we had had little experience of, and that he told us to bear in mind that we were American soldiers and to show how Americans can fight. To this the men responded by shouting "Lets go!", "Lets go!".

We took the long dusty road from Montmirail, each soldier carrying a full infantry pack, including of course, his rifle and 220 rounds of ammunition. [EDITOR'S NOTE: 20 rounds of .30-06 ammunition weighs about one pound, making eleven pounds of ammunition PLUS the nine pound weight of the Springfield Model 1903 Rifle, PLUS food, clothing, and bedding that each man carried.] The French troops sent up in heavily loaded motor trucks, passed us on the road. It was evident that a crisis was impending somewhere at the front, and each man of us knew that it was our business to get into position as soon as possible. At the end of each hour of marching we were given a brief rest. Each man carried his own rations and depended upon the supply of water in his canteen when he started from Montmirail, as we had orders not to drink from the wells along the roadside.

On the way we met many refugees hurrying away from the battle area. They were very old men, women and children. A few were taking their families and what household goods they had saved in wagons drawn by broken-down horses. Many of them carried their little bundles upon their back.

A number of women were carrying babies in their arms while little children clung to their skirts in bewilderment. They gave to us Americans a tired and weary greeting with a wave of the hand or scarf as we passed.

At about 11 o'clock that night, having marched practically continuously for 10 hours under a load for each man of 90 pounds, we arrived at our position and went into camp in a piece of woods. The long hike tested everyone of us to the limit, but nearly all of the company got in on time.

In the morning the Germans began sending over a barrage of considerable intensity. They did not have the range of our position however and the shells went over us. Orders were given to "dig in" and we constructed our dug outs. This done, we proceeded to dig a line of reserve trenches to be used in case the front line was forced back by a German advance.

We remained in this position for some days, acting as support of a French regiment in front of us which was holding the front lines. It was while we were stationed in this sector that I was detailed acting company clerk, our former clerk having been promoted to sergeant. Company headquarters was located in a room in an old stone barn a short distance from the woods where we had dug in on the morning after our arrival.

A dwelling house stood near by. Evidently its former occupants had left in a hurry shortly before we took possession of the premises for we found a cow grazing in the field adjoining, and two pigs were in their pen.

The officers immediately secured the cow which we drove into the barn for safe-keeping for various reasons. One being the danger she was in from German shells and the other the danger of some other outfit nearby appropriating her to themselves, something which happened to one of our pigs which we could not watch so closely. Not to be robbed of all our fresh pork, we killed and roasted the other pig immediately which provided us with delicious rations for a number of days.

With reference to the cow it was my duty to feed and take care of her and as Captain Reid, who, (as I mention him here for the first time), I will state was a good deal of a father to all the boys in his company and one of the best soldiers and men, was the only one of the staff who could milk, or who would admit they could, performed that duty and as the milking was usually done in the dark, for no lights were allowed anywhere that might be seen from German bombing planes, we lost not a little milk as the Captain's shoes and putties frequently showed.

Here, those connected with headquarters occupied the adjoining farm house which had been left just as the owners had hurried from it. We lived with about all the comforts anyone could desire, having but one regret in the loss of our pig, the want of which soon put us back on army rations.

On or about June 15th we went up to the front line on the Marne River a short distance east of Chateau Thierry. Here company headquarters was located in a dugout made in one side of a deep ravine. Here also were located the dugouts of the men of the company. This ravine was about 50 feet deep with rough and rocky sides, from which were growing a number of tall trees. It was about a mile from the Marne, extending westerly from the location of our dugouts nearly parallel with the river, but just beyond our location to the east the ravine curved away from the river towards the south. The side toward the Marne was so abrupt that we had three or four flights of steps put into the earth by which we came and went to the level ground above on our way to and from the line near the river.

Extending from the edge of the ravine towards the river was a small piece of woods and just beyond was open country of field land. Across the field, just where the hill began to rise, stood a few houses forming a little village. The hill rose gradually, at its top forming a long irregular ridge paralleling the Marne, and sloping down towards the river to field land about a third of a mile wide forming the valley of the Marne. On both slopes of the hill, some quite large trees grew, some in orchards and others of different variety singly. Here and there on its slopes were depressions in the ground and at places thickets of under brush and small trees. A field of wheat grew on the side of the hill towards the river, and about half the way across the level ground bordering the stream was the embankment of the railroad which crossed the river at Chateau Thierry and followed along the valley towards Paris. This railroad embankment was our front line at which was placed one half of our company at a time, the other being stationed in the ravine in reserve waiting its turn for service at the embankment or to be sent up to assist those already there, in holding the line in case of a German attack.

From the point at the edge of the ravine where it made the turn southward, our company had constructed trenches extending the line of the natural defense offered by the ravine, making a second line of defense for use in emergency. The six weeks following our occupation of this sector were comparatively quiet with only an occasional shell coming over from the enemy. From our front line at the railroad we could see plainly the country on the opposite side of the Marne, which like that upon our side spread away from the river at a low level for perhaps a third of a mile and then rose gradually to a hill, its slope uneven and broken in places extending along the course of the river out of sight on our right and left. There were no visible signs of German occupation of the country in our immediate front.

During this period of quietness on two occasions patrols from my company crossed the river and scouted the country on the German side. We used an old boat which had been found somewhere in the village back of the hill, repaired for use and carried over at night to the river. The boat was flat bottom and square at both ends, and accommodated seven or eight men. One of our men swam across the river taking with him one end of the rope attached to the boat and from the other side drew us noiselessly across. I went in the first patrol.

We scouted the lowland and hillside to its top and partly down the other side, moving as silently as possible, crouching as low as we could walk and creeping in places, always keeping our rifles ready for instant service. But we found no evidence of Germans in the territory we scouted.

As the weeks passed unbroken in their quiet routine we almost had to search for reminder that we were engaged in warfare, and this too in the very front line of the allied forces.

As an illustration of how unexciting this period was the following incident will serve. One afternoon another boy of my company and myself went on a little exploring expedition through the village which stood about the railroad already mentioned and at the extreme left of the front line of our company. The former inhabitants had vacated their homes and it was certainly a deserted village of the plain. In one of the houses, a large and rather imposing structure, still remained the mahogany furniture and much of other household goods. One of the rooms had its walls nearly covered with plate glass mirrors. In a garage we found a Renault Motor Car with gasoline in the tank. We tried for hours to start the engine, for what purpose except to start it I do not know. Although we all but took the engine down and put it together again to find the trouble we had to admit at last that it was beyond us and gave up trying. We had a pleasant afternoon, however, to myself and I have no doubt it was likewise to my comrade,

the oddness of the situation made up a good deal of the interest we took in the work we did on the old motor car. Here we were within a stones throw of front line of the allied army. Outside the garage in which we were tinkering on the old motor was all the evidence of the greatest war the world had known. A mile or two over the hills beyond the river were the German lines and but little farther their heavy guns that might begin shelling our lines at any minute. Yet within that little garage on that summer afternoon all was as quiet and as unwarlike as though it were in some retired New England village.

THE SECOND BATTLE OF THE MARNE

On July 14, 1918, we had been in this sector on the Marne for about a month. A month too devoid of important events. Each days report could have been dittoed from the preceding. The day of the 14th was no exception.

For most of the time the whole countryside was as quiet as though a thousand miles from a battle line. The evening came and dragged along toward midnight. In the Orderly Room (dugout) company headquarters in the ravine, only the first sergeant and myself, were left, the other officers having gone out some time before. Each night at about this time I began making out the sergeant's report for the day, the Captain coming in later to look it over and sign it, after which I took it over to the post runner who carried it back to battalion headquarters. This night the sergeant told me that as there was no change in the report from that of the day before I could make it out according to that and as he was not needed, he was going to turn in. He then went out.

I began typewriting the report. Only the click of my typewriter broke the stillness of the place. Then suddenly blending in one tremendous explosion came the crash and roar of bursting shells. The German artillery had the exact range of our position in the ravine, and were sending shrapnel and high explosive shells upon us. They came one after another in quick succession, sometimes a number together as fast as one could count. At the sounding of our gas alarm I whipped on my gas mask. Soon a number of the boys came down into the orderly room all equipped and ready for action and there we waited for orders. The shelling continued without ceasing.

About day break, Captain Reid came down with one or two other officers and gave the order, "Every man to the Front." We were ready instantly and followed him out.

The scene in the ravine outside the dugout was beyond description, trees, blown up by the roots, shattered and splintered, lay on the ground in every direction. The place was literally hell. Deep shell holes pitted the ground everywhere. Fragments of human bodies were scattered about amid the wood, rocks and sand. Wounded men with arms or legs shattered or severed lay moaning among the debris. There were men's feet and arms protruding from the earth showing where some soldier had been killed or buried alive in his dugout. Half of the men of the reserve in the ravine had been killed or wounded.

Those of the company who came through the barrage uninjured, even the company cook, followed Captain Reid up the side of the ravine, climbing over fallen trees and through shell holes, to the ground above and hastened forward to the front line at the railroad embankment, where the rest of the company were fighting. The German artillery was then throwing a barrage beyond us to keep our support from coming up, while their infantry was crossing the river in boats and on rafts, firing as they came, while their machine guns on the opposite bank swept our position with a rain of bullets. At this time our position behind the railroad embankment was a good one as it allowed us to pour our rifle fire upon the oncoming masses of Germans with considerable protection to our bodies from their machine gun and rifle fire, as well as from bursting shells in front. But we had to expose

our heads above the track as we aimed and fired upon the enemy and German bullets and shrapnel got many of our boys.

We had orders to adjust the sights of our rifles at battle range of 300 yards and our fire did such execution among the dense mass of Germans in front of us that for a while we stopped their advance at the river's edge. But the thousands behind pressed their first line on and soon a large number of Germans were on our side of the river while others were continually crossing.

They soon got over a number of machine guns which were set up a little way from the river and these trained upon our position assisted their shrapnel and high explosives, which had begun to fall among us, in the attack. But we never doubted that we could hold them, expecting reinforcements to come up to aid us, and the French artillery which was supposed to be our support to open up an answering barrage upon the dense mass of Germans crowding over the river. But evidently reinforcements could not get through the German barrage and, although I recall seeing a number of boats capsize with their load of men in the river, I feel secure in the statement that at least on our particular front we fought until late in the day before receiving artillery assistance of much consequence.

In this, the Second Battle of the Marne, the 38th U. S. Inf. as a part of the Third Division was attached to the 6th French Army, Company F of the 38th was stationed on the regiment's extreme right connecting the American line with the line of the French troops. Our artillery support was French. I have read in a report of the battle that the German artillery bombardment on the position of the guns was so terrific that the gun crews were driven from their pieces.

In Co. F, we had no hand or rifle grenades, relying entirely upon our rifle fire and two automatic rifles placed on the right and left ends of our company front.

The feeling of one in battle, as I saw and experienced it, can hardly be described to one who knows nothing of it. The change from a normal state of mind to the excitement of battle changes the mind of the participant as radically as it changes everything in the scene. After getting into action a soldier loses all fear although about him are the bodies of the dead comrades, over which he steps or kneels to take his ammunition bandolier, ever an incentive to avenge his death upon the enemy.

Under a storm of bursting shells and rain of bullets men stood as coolly as they did at rifle practice on the range. If ever General Pershing's order for the training of American infantry for rifle marksmen was tested for its value in battle it was with the boys of the 38th in the Second Battle of the Marne where the Germans made their last great drive to break the allied lines with high confidence of success. Every American soldier in front of them was equally as confident that we would stop them.

As we fought at the railroad embankment, our boys frequently would call another's attention to his mark among the enemy and tell the other to watch him drop. Invariably that particular enemy did drop.

Early in the battle, German airplanes began to come over and apparently got the range of our position for their heavy artillery, for soon after, shells from their artillery commenced to fall on and about the railroad embankment which we were using as a breast work, blowing it to pieces and killing and wounding many of our company. With the embankment gone, we were in the open, under the enemy's rifle, numerous machine guns, and shrapnel shell fire. Behind the rolling barrage of their artillery the Germans, though terribly punished by our fire, formed at the river bank and advanced. We piled them in actual heaps of dead and again and again stopped them. After the embankment was gone, we lay as low on the ground as we could and

fired our rifles in that position.

Our support on the right of the company gave ground and the enemy continually outflanked us, compelling us to fall back to keep the Germans from surrounding us. We retired up the hillside, falling back but a few yards at a time, fighting the enemy on the front and right company flank. In this manner we retired up the hill keeping our line formation and observing our distances between each other, which grew wider as we retired as killed and wounded men lessened our number.

In the course of retiring we left considerable ammunition stored in an old stone building between us and the enemy. A detail of a few of us was made up and sent out to bring the ammunition cases in. This we did protecting ourselves as much as possible at one wall and by tree stumps and bushes on the hillside.

At one time during the fight on the hill, the Germans got a machine gun in position among some underbrush and small trees and raking our flank killed many of our men. Under the command of Lt. Bush a number of us crept through the grass and bushes to their rear and before they could turn the gun upon us we covered them with our rifles while the Lieutenant called on them to surrender. They immediately threw up their hands. There were six or seven Germans in the party, one of them who looked of middle age fell upon his knees before the Lieutenant and holding his hands above his head called out "kamerad", and begged us not to kill them. Under guard of one or two men they were all sent to the rear. The machine gun proved to be a French piece and a corporal in our party who knew how to work the gun put it in action upon our side.

About noon, I think, we had retired to the top of the hill. Just over the pitch of the hill we again prepared to hold the oncoming enemy but their continual outflanking movement as our support on the right was driven back, forced us slowly from position to position until we reached the squad trenches at the foot of the hill. Here we held them until well into the afternoon, when we made a counter attack fighting our way up the hill, driving the Germans before us over ground literally covered with our dead and theirs.

Over the hill top we drove them and they fell back precipitately down the side to the lowland below, where they seemed in great confusion, running to the right and left.

In the action at the top of the hill, a shrapnel shell hit the ground at my side and three pieces struck me, one piece entering my right groin, another my right arm at the elbow, the third making a flesh wound in my side. Lieutenant Bush asked if I was hit, and seeing instantly that I had been, told one of the boys to get me back to the first aid station, which was located in the cellar of one of the shattered houses at the foot of the hill. My right leg was paralyzed, as also my right arm. The wound in the groin was bleeding in a stream. With the assistance of my comrade, I made out to get down the hill and nearly to the first aid station, when I lost consciousness. The comrade with me got some water and revived me, then saying that he would have to get some help to take me any farther, he went away. I never saw him again, whether one of the shells bursting around us got him I do not know.

As my comrade did not return, I tried to get up and go on but I found this to be impossible. I could not get to my feet and dragging my helpless leg I managed to crawl back within hailing distance of the station. At my call, the men there came over with a stretcher and carried me into the cellar where my wounds received first aid treatment.

I was then taken to the cellar of another shell wrecked house nearby. There some mattresses, taken I think, from the houses in the neighborhood had been placed on the ground for the wounded to lie upon. Six other boys from my regiment were already there. The

medical sergeant informed us that when night came an ambulance would be able to get up through the barrage and take us back to the hospital. It was then, I think, about 5 o'clock in the afternoon.

As we lay in that cellar we heard the battle going on above us. Shells were bursting amid the incessant crackle of the rifle and machine gun fire. During the first part of the night, the noise of the battle seemed to diminish near us but was heavy not far away. It seemed strange to us that the ambulance did not come up to get us, and more strange that none of our men came down where we were. We were of course unaware that the flanking movement of the Germans, notwithstanding the advance we had made in the afternoon, had forced our company to retire beyond where we lay, and thought that as the drive had been stopped along our front and the Germans driven back to the river that their drive had been turned.

Our throats were dry from thirst, as all the water we had had that day was what we carried in our canteens into action in the morning, or a drink given us when our wounds were dressed.

Four of the boys had been gassed, and could whisper their wishes for water to relieve their burning throats, but they suffered uncomplainingly.

They died so quietly one night that none of us knew until, daylight dimly lighting the place showed to the rest of us that their suffering was over.

In the morning of the second day when the battle above us had subsided, we could hear men talking outside. We knew by the tones that they were neither Americans nor French. One of the boys who could walk went cautiously to the foot of the stairway leading from the cellar to the ground above, and looked out, coming back and telling us in a whisper that the Germans were all about us. The same boy hunted about the cellar for some weapons to protect ourselves with in case the Germans came down, as we thought in a few hours our army would force the enemy back, and if we could keep from being captured for a short while we might be rescued, besides what we had heard of German treatment of prisoners of war determined us to fight to the last if we could find the means to do so.

Our comrade finally found an automatic revolver, but it was empty and he could find no ammunition clip. So we had to give up acting on the defensive, and waited for developments. If we had gotten anything to fight with we would have got the first lot of Germans that came down anyway. Such was our determination, but of course, we could not have held out long, situated as we were and all wounded. It is certainly just as well that we did not attempt any resistance as it could have done us no good and would have meant that the Germans would have killed us all.

That day, the 16th of July, a German soldier came down where we were. He had a loaf of white bread under his arm. One of the boys, a soldier from Pennsylvania, who could talk some German asked him for the bread. The German gave it to him and went out and brought us in a small pail of cold coffee. This was the first food we had had since chow on the night of the fifteenth, and it was the only food or drink we had until the forenoon of the 19th, when a party of German soldiers came down and took out the three of us who were still living.

Why did the Germans leave us in that cellar from the 16th to the 19th? I have asked myself that question and I can think of no other answer than this: They did not want to be bothered with wounded prisoners of war and left us there for as many of us as might to die and save them the trouble of giving us any aid. This was probably the policy of the officers, as the German soldier who gave the loaf of bread and pail of coffee on the morning of the 16th seemed kind enough.

Outside on the ground above the cellar where we were taken, many

German soldiers were at work or standing about in groups. The two Germans who took me from the cellar started back, carrying me on a stretcher towards the Marne. The other two wounded boys were carried back in the same manner. We went over the same ground we had fought over on the 15th.

The Germans had buried the dead and on the hillside had thrown up a line of entrenchment, and placed machine guns in position. On the way back we stopped while a party of Germans took what property we had about us, taking from me my watch, ring, shoes and leggings and money. A little way farther back we were carried to the presence of a group of German officers. One of them inquired in correct English how many American soldiers there were in France. I did not wish to give the correct information, in fact I did not know myself, but thought I would make the number large enough to let him know we meant business and bad business for the Germans, and replied, "Five million". My answer so angered him that he snapped his revolver from its holster and aimed it at my forehead. He stood for some moments, minutes, it seemed to me, without speaking, looking me directly in the eye with a glance that seemed to indicate that his decision to kill me was balanced, as it were, upon a needless point.

Still pointing the revolver at my head he said, "Let me tell you that we do not want to be bothered with wounded prisoners, and I warn you not to lie to me again. We know how many Americans there are in France. Even know the regiment you belong to. I want to see if you will tell me the truth." And then as if it was his last warning he said more deliberately, "I shall know if you lie."

He then asked me if I had seen any submarines on the voyage overseas. I told him I had not. After inquiring if I knew where our ammunition dumps were, to which I answered that I did not, he ordered the soldiers to take me away.

We were then taken up and carried on the stretchers over the bridge they had built across the Marne to the other side. The bridge was crowded with trucks and teams loaded with army supplies and soldiers were crossing going to the front. On the Eastern side of the river, we were placed in a cart and carried to their field hospital where we were given first aid treatment. We were then taken to a German army hospital where we stayed two days receiving fair treatment. We were then taken to the German Prison Camp at Trelon in Belgium.

THE GERMAN PRISON CAMP AT TRELON

Trelon is a small city in Belgium. The German Prison camp there was a number of factory buildings surrounded by a barbed wire fence about ten feet high, situated in the outskirts of the city.

The building I was placed in was about 100 feet square and made of brick, one story high. The floor was divided into rooms. In the middle of the building was the operating room, having on one side the quarters of the German officers in charge, and on the other the large room occupied by the prisoners of war. A corridor extended along the whole front of the building into which opened the doors leading from the rooms adjoining.

Along the sides of the prisoners' room two rows of bunks were built, one row above the other, and in the central space of the room were rows of single beds.

The bunk I occupied was one of those along the side of the room, that above mine was occupied by a boy from my regiment named William Morris, a soldier from the State of Washington, who had been captured with me.

His kindness to me was untiring and I was much in need of it, as I could not get about without help of someone. My bed, like the others, was a bundle of shavings enclosed in paper covering. My blanket had evidently been in use for a long time, uncleaned before in the round of coming and departing prisoners of war it had

come to me. It was of course infested with cooties. Up to the time of my capture I had kept free of them but a few days at Trelon found my clothing and person infested with them.

For perhaps two weeks after my arrival at the prison camp, I was able with the assistance of some of my fellow prisoners of war, usually Morris, to get outside and sit in the sunshine, and do something towards reducing the number of cooties on my clothing and body, but even this I soon had to give up. My wound in the groin owing to careless and indifferent treatment by the prison doctors, had grown worse daily, until, at the expiration of about two weeks I was confined to my bed. The piece of shrapnel was still in the wound and remained there for 23 days before being removed. The wound had been given careless treatment, as I have stated, each third or fourth day, but no attempt had been made by the doctors to find the shrapnel. The paper bandages with which it was dressed would stay in place but an hour or two, if as long, leaving the wound open to infection from the cooties, which got into the raw flesh.

This condition effected my body generally, so that my stomach revolted at the bad food of the prison fare. This was one piece of sour bread of black meal, or least it may have been meal, mixed with ground potato peeling, issued once daily, and two bowls of soup made of one peck of barley to 50 gallons of water, occasionally but seldom, with turnips in it, issued twice daily. In justice to the Germans I must not omit to say that each of us received one pickled herring while at Trelon. The one given me I made last as long as possible, picking a shred or two at a time as a relish for the sour bread and soup. I think most of the other boys did the same.

About three weeks after my arrival at the camp, the shrapnel in my groin was removed. No anaesthetic was used. The prison doctor simply probing in the wound for the piece of shell until the pain caused me to lose consciousness while the piece was extracted. This was the method used by the German doctors at the prison in treating wounded prisoners of war.

One day in the operating room I saw them amputate a wounded French soldier's arm, cutting until he fainted and then finished the operation.

I was obliged to stay in my bunk, all the time, depending upon the care of some of my fellow prisoners of war. The flesh about my wound had gangrened and the wound became a progressing sore. A large abscess formed on my leg below it. In this condition I was unable to protect myself from the cooties that covered me. They were so numerous that I saw them darting about even on the outside of my blanket.

As I have stated, I could eat but little of the black bread ration and the soup although more palatable had little or no nourishment. Once in a while, a French prisoner gave me a Red Cross biscuit from his package, and a Canadian prisoner gave me a few times a biscuit he took from the lot which an Englishman had stored in abundance in packages under his bunk. These had been received from the English Red Cross. The watchful eye of the Canadian had discovered the Englishman's store and knowing that he had more than he had need of, felt justified in taking one occasionally, which he gave to me. But for two months after my arrival at Trelon, my usual ration was one piece of that black bread and two small bowls of the soup I had described.

At the end of that period I think I was as near "going west " as I ever will be and not complete the journey. I was but the shadow of my former self. I could not have weighed more than 114 pounds, my weight when I came out of Germany. And when I state that I weighed 185 pounds at the time I was wounded, I have told what the Germans did for me at Trelon.

Such was my condition after two months at this place. And my prospects gave little encouragement, but I knew what giving up meant, for I had seen others in the prison lose their nerve. They never lived long after that.

I am living today because of the kindness of a noble Catholic Sister of Mercy, a French woman, who visited the wounded French soldiers in our barracks. I think she must have been associated with the French Red Cross Service. To her, I owe one of the greatest debts of gratitude. I can never repay her, but I shall never forget her or her kindness towards me.

I had seen her for some days moving about among the seriously ill and wounded French soldiers, giving to each a small dish of food. One day, she came over to my bunk and gave me a dish of that food. It was boiled rice and cocoa and warm. As I took the food she spoke to me but I could understand but little of what she said. I needed not to for her face and manner exemplified her kind heart and saintly soul. And that dish of boiled rice and cocoa! Nothing ever tasted so good before. When I had eaten it, I wondered if I would get any more of it another day. The next day, I watched her move among the sick and wounded men on her daily visit and wondered if she would remember me. I was not forgotten and every day after until we were taken from Trelon, our Sister of Mercy, indeed, gave me a share of that rice and cocoa.

A week or two before we left Trelon, I was able to get out of my bunk and assisted by Morris or some other fellow prisoner, or by steadying myself by the foot of the cots or other objects move about the barracks room. My wound, however, had not begun to heal, and did not until under the better care received from the Russian doctor at Heilsberg Prison Camp, sometime later.

Along about the first of October we began to hear the distant booming of the heavy artillery at the front. To us, it was something like a promise of deliverance, for we believed, as was indeed the case, that the Germans were being driven back by our armies. At this time with assistance I was able to get outside the barrack room into the prison yard. Soon our understanding as to the military situation was confirmed, as we saw passing along the road in front of the camp the evidence of the German retreat.

Their great army trucks and teams were crowding back through Trelon loaded with hay, machinery, household goods and all sorts of army supplies. They were also taking back their heavy guns and batteries of field artillery.

Two nights before we left Trelon the place was subjected to air raids from the allies. Our barracks were usually lighted at night, both outside and in, by a few electric lights, and when the German guard heard the sounds of the approaching bombing planes they rushed into the room shouting to us to put off the lights, as they did those outside in the yard.

The air raiders came over two nights in succession and we could hear the bombs they dropped exploding near by, but the prison camp was not hit.

A few nights after the first air raid the German guards ordered us to be prepared to move the next morning, and before day break we were ordered out, our names checked off, and day was just breaking as we marched out through the prison gate. My friend Morris and another fellow prisoner helped me along. As we went through the street of the city to the railroad station, the Belgian inhabitants were out in numbers to see us. Many cheered as we went past. Some of the people tried to give us loaves of bread but the German guards angrily prevented them from doing so.

At the railroad station we were ordered into the box cars of the

train waiting, 48 men to a car, and began our journey towards Germany. At the various stops on the way the door of the car was opened to give us some food.

Our rations were scant even for German methods, and issued irregularly on the way. At one stopping place, one of the boys in my car saw a garbage barrel on the station platform, and jumping out before the guard could prevent him, ran to the barrel and pulled out a string of frankfurters which had been thrown away by the Germans as unfit to eat, ran back to the car, climbed in and distributed them among us. We removed the skin covering to make them somewhat less offensive and ate them. That tells how nearly starved we were.

At another place we stopped opposite a train loaded with carrots. Some of the boys reached over and got a few but the Germans made the boys give them up and we got none.

Occasionally a German soldier vented his hatred upon us Americans by coming to our door and calling us "American Swine". They seemed to hate the Americans more than any other nation at that time. I suppose they knew even then why they had lost the war.

Our train passed through Berlin, stopping one night in the train yard and proceeding on the way in the morning. We were six days and seven nights in those cars, and on the 25th of October arrived at Heilsberg, a city in East Prussia about 75 miles from the Russian boundary and 200 miles south of Danzig. Of the 48 men who left Trelon in the car with me, twenty three died on the journey to Heilsberg.

IN THE GERMAN PRISON CAMP AT HEILSBERG

The German Prison Camp at Heilsberg was much larger than that at Trelon. It was formed of wooden buildings one story high surrounded like those at Trelon with a barbed wire fence. We arrived here at night on October 25th. The camp had originally been used entirely for Russian prisoners, some of whom had been captured by the Germans during the first year of the war.

When I arrived here, my condition was worse than it had been since I was wounded. The long jolting journey with so little and such unfit food to eat and practically no care of my wound had made me so ill that I had to be taken from the car and carried to my bed in the prison barracks. My case, however, soon attracted the attention of the Russian doctor among the prisoners of war who immediately gave me the best treatment his limited means afforded, cleansing and dressing my wounds as often as needed so that in about a month after arriving at Heilsberg I was able to get around the barrack room by assisting myself with the stationary objects in the room.

During the month that I was confined to my bed, my fellow Russian prisoners of war treated me with the greatest kindness. By signs, I was able to make my needs known to them and day or night whenever I needed help, I had but to ask and never once but I found ready and cheerfully willing to give it. Their kindness helped me beyond description through the lonesome weeks I passed at Heilsberg after all those who came with me from Trelon had been taken to other camps according to their different nationalities, and I being unable to go with them became the only one not a Russian in my barracks.

I have nothing but praise for the Russians I lived among as fellow prisoners of war at Heilsberg. They were considerate and generous to each other and each seemed to seek in many ways to relieve the cheerless days of stay at this camp.

But to resume the thread of my narrative, we found the prison fare here the same as at Trelon with the addition of receiving one ration of horse meat and occasionally there were some potatoes in our soup. I also while here received a part of two Red Cross packages.

On November 11th, we learned of the signing of the Armistice. In celebration of which the German guards at the camp fired their rifles and the whole place was in an uproar. Most of the prison guard, I think all, went away, I suppose, to celebrate with their countrymen and the camp was left unguarded for a day or two. Taking advantage of the opportunity, some of the Russians who had a little money, (for some of them had earned a few marks which the Germans had allowed them to receive from the farmers in the vicinity for whom they had labored), went out and bought some beer, returning with it to the barracks where they shared it with their fellow prisoners whether contributors to the fund or not. Others who had gone to the unguarded commissary of the camp brought in the freshest bread and we had what seemed to us a feast.

As I began to gain strength and was able to move about the barracks the Germans transferred me to the lager, or barrack where the prisoners of war able to work were quartered. I rather welcomed the change as I thought if I could get out on some farm with considerate treatment and better food, I could get my strength back.

All this was taking a chance I knew. I had also learned that all prisoners of war had to be off the sick list before being transferred to any other camp which was the first move toward home. In fact, I had nothing to say about where I would go, I was ordered to the lager and went.

It was a sort of cellar, roofed over, with an entrance in each end. The doors were off their hinges and never closed while I was there, and the place was unheated. As this was in the month of December it was, of course, in this northern climate, very cold. Our clothing consisted of a thin blouse of something like cotton cloth, with pants of the same material and shoes with wooden soles with cloth uppers. We each had two blankets. We slept upon the floor, and for warmth two or three of the prisoners would form a company, each contributing his blankets for all to lie upon and for covering.

Thus huddled together, Americans and Russians, Rumanians and English, French and Italians.

The first night I passed in the lager left me with a cold and rheumatism, so that I could hardly get to my feet. After a day or two here the rheumatism settled seemingly in every joint of my body. Still as my temperature did not show 103 degrees, the German mark for a sick prisoner of war, I was not permitted to go back to the sick barrack. I remained here wrapped in my blankets upon the damp floor until an Australian prisoner of war who assisted the prison doctor provided the means of my getting back to warmer quarters by accelerating the thermometer on one occasion by briskly rubbing it upon the sleeve of his blouse without being observed until the requisite degree was reached. I was then taken back to the warmer barrack and Russian friends, where I was confined to my bed for about two weeks.

Sometime after this all, the American, French, English, and Italian prisoners of war, excepting myself and two other Americans, were sent away, and soon after these two left also, leaving me with the Russians and Rumanians remaining. These although I could not converse in their language, by their untiring kindness towards me made my lonesomeness bearable.

It was now about the middle of December. I had been in Heilsberg a month since the Armistice, and even the German sergeant at the prison who had formerly lived in New York and could speak English, could give me no idea when I would be released, or in fact that my situation was known to anyone outside the camp. I had never been registered with the Red Cross Service.

I had received no Red Cross packages. The only Red Cross

rations I had received since arriving at Heilsberg, in fact all of such I received while in Germany, was a part of a division of two packages at different times at this camp. Evidently there was no record outside of the camp at Heilsberg as to where I was existed. It seemed that if I ever got out of Germany it would be by my own efforts. As for the Germans, I had no faith in receiving help from any of them. My single hope was in two letters I had written home, one in October and the other in November, on paper bearing the address of the Prison Camp at Heilsberg. I knew if either of these had been received every effort possible would be made to get me out of Germany. The question remained, however, did these letters get to their destination through the German mails as promised.

With the passing of December, my chances of getting out seemed remote. I was still so weak that I could get about only with difficulty.

I had about given up hope when on the 3rd of January 1919, notice was given me that I was to be sent out. I was not told where, but anywhere offered a better chance than staying in the prison camp.

I went out with a party of Russians, and in our company was an Englishman who, I forgot to state, had been left in the camp when his comrades went out some weeks before. We had two miles or more, or it seemed to me that far, to walk over snow and icy roads to the railway station, and I owe it to the two Russians who supported me on the way and helped me into the box car, that I made the journey. Neither do I forget the English soldier who carried my parcel of rations.

After a day and night journey we arrived at the seaport city of Danzig January 5th. The train ran down upon the pier built out into the harbor, and, I looked from the car doorway, I saw close by waving from the mast of a warship, the Stars and Stripes.

The question I asked myself was, had they come for me? However it was, determined to get beneath that flag again if it was my last effort.

We were ordered out of the car and with the help of the Russians I got down, and lined up with them along the pier. A naval officer in U.S. uniform stood nearby watching us as we formed the line, and then, passing along our ranks to the German officer in charge, he asked the German if he had an American prisoner of war in the company.

The German answered that he had and at the American officer's request, called out my number. I stepped forward and saluted the American who inquired my name, regiment and other identification questions. To my answers the American officer replied, "You are the man I have come for." Then turning to the German he said, "I will take this man." He signed for me in a book in the German's hand and told me to come with him.

I followed the officer down the gang plank of the ship, the destroyer USS Wickes, and was evidently a sight of much interest to the sailors who stood about the deck watching me.

The ship's doctor took me in charge, gave me a small drink of brandy, and then I was given something to eat. My ragged suit of prison clothes and wooden shoes were removed and thrown into the harbor. But before this was done, I cut from the sleeve of the blouse the number 2863 which I had worn as a prisoner of war. I also took from the pocket of the blouse the post card picture of my home in Maine which I had in the pocket of my army shirt when I was captured, and which had escaped the notice of the Germans when they took my other property. The picture I had brought with me from Camp Hancock, I have it now. I prize it for the help it gave me the thousand times I looked at it during that unforgettable period of my life as a German prisoner of war. This together with a ring given me by

a Russian prisoner of war, and made by him, and a cigarette case given me by the Sergeant at Heilsberg I saved.

The sailors of the Wickes took me to the ship's bath and there scrubbed me with hot water and soap.

I was then furnished with a suit of sailor's clothes, each sailor contributing something until enough articles had been provided to fit me out completely in a sailor's uniform.

I was then weighed and my weight was found to be 114 pounds. My weight when captured was 185 pounds.

Two days later we were in Copenhagen Harbor, where by kindness of the commanding officer of the Wickes I was able to send word by wireless that I was on my way home, the first information received there concerning me since I was reported "Missing in Action on July 15th."

We left Copenhagen a few days later arriving at Rosyth, Scotland, January 8th.

On the voyage from Danzig, the ship's kitchen seemed carried for my special benefit, and the cook never tired in preparing for me the best dishes the ship afforded. The kindness of the officers and sailors alike leave a memory to be cherished through my whole life.

On January 12 at Rosyth I was transferred to the flagship Chester, and on the 14th was ordered by Admiral Sims to report at army headquarters in London.

I arrived in London on January 15th and there reported immediately at Army Headquarters as ordered. I received orders here to report at the rest camp at Winchester, where I remained at Morn Hill until February 12th, waiting for the filling up of a company of casualties for the United States.

On February 19th we left Winchester for Liverpool, thence on board the U. S. Transport Plattsburg to Brest where the ship took on board other casualties and then, after a voyage of 19 days, we saw the welcome sight of the home shores.

Camp Merritt again, and finally Camp Devens, where I received my discharge from the Army on March 23rd, 1919, complete the narrative of my personal experiences in the A. E. F. which I have described in these pages.

March 24th, 1919, home, the sight of which and greeting there give the climax to my feelings of joy inspired by the sight of the Stars and Stripes in Danzig Harbor and the welcome they gave me on the Wickes.