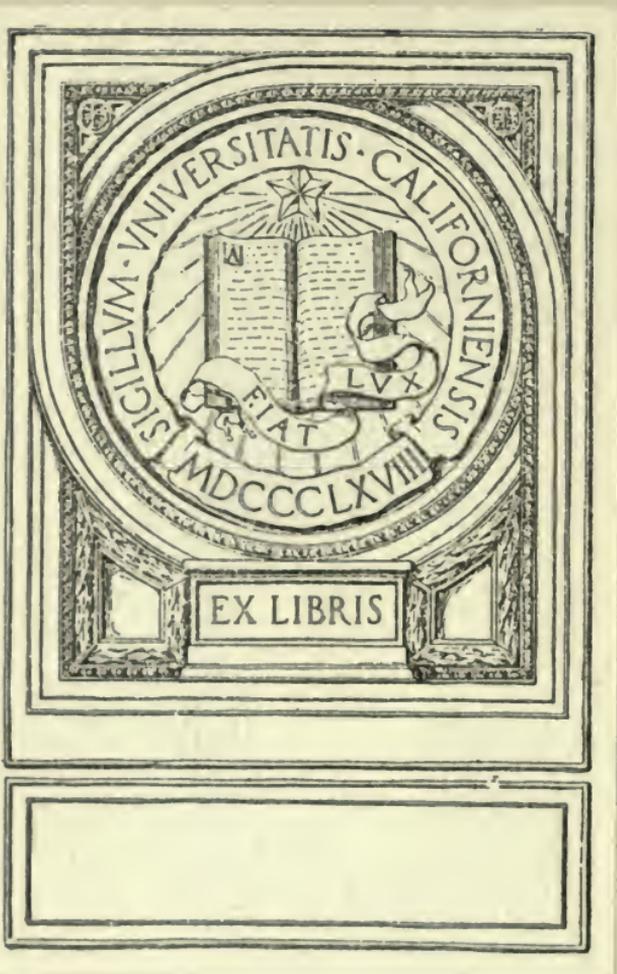


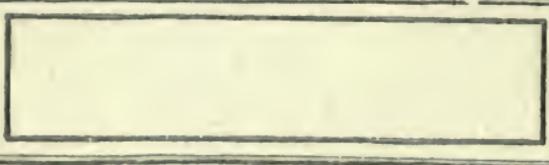
# TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

JOHN IDEN KAUTZ





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**TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES**



# TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

LETTERS FROM FRANCE  
JUNE-NOVEMBER 1917

BY JOHN IDEN KAUTZ



BOSTON AND NEW YORK  
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY  
*The Riverside Press Cambridge*

1918.



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*Published April 1918*

TO THE  
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

## PREFACE

THE following letters have been prepared for publication without the knowledge of their writer. They were written to members of his family and to friends and contained many personal references, which have, of course, been omitted.

These excisions have left the narrative abrupt in places. It was at first intended to have the matter rewritten, but that plan was abandoned because of the conclusion that what the book might gain in smoothness and in literary finish it might easily lose in freshness and spontaneity.

The author (then still in his minority), having been refused by the army of his own country because of defective eyes, volunteered for the field service in France, and these letters are a record of his six

## PREFACE

months' service in the French army just prior to being taken over by the army of the United States. As narrated in the letters, the American army in France counted the experience gained in six months' hard service as more than compensation for defective vision.

It was a wonderful thing — this gathering in the spring of 1917 from the colleges all over our country for volunteer service under a foreign flag. Most of the boys were moved very little by the spirit of adventure. They were impelled by a high desire to do something — what they could — in the world crisis, and they have given very freely and effectively of their youth and strength.

There is in our attic a trunk in which are placed the silk socks, silk shirts, dress-suits, jewelry of all kinds, and neckties — things which this time last year were absolutely essential to the dress and happiness

## PREFACE

of our boys. God grant they come back to them, but no longer will these things have the same value, nor will they seem so absolutely necessary, for the boys will have put away childish things. That is one of the saddest parts of the war — the little boys of yesterday struggling to be men need struggle no longer. In these months abroad they have seen more, gone through more experiences, than life at home would have brought them in as many years.

These letters are so interesting and so close to us that we fear almost to give them to the world. They are just home letters, and perhaps it would have been just as well to keep them — home letters. They were written by a boy who is not far from the “holes in knickerbockers” time, and are just the everyday happenings of six months’ trucking service.

INDIANAPOLIS, *March 25*, 1918.



**TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES**



## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

*S.S. Rochambeau, May 26.*

SANDY HOOK LIGHT lies an hour behind us. The pilot has gone back, and the last shore lights have faded away in the shadows of the sea.

Just now the hearts of all of us on board are not light. There were many friends, many parents, some sweethearts, and a few wives to say good-bye to the boys of the party. A good many forgot to be brave at the last minute, and it was hard to turn away. When we backed out of the slip to steam down the river, the boys attempted a cheer, but it broke in the middle and failed utterly, miserably.

You see, we all feel that the trip across is the most dangerous part of it all. Over

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

there one has, even in the tightest places, a chance of getting out. Out here, even though the boats are always swung over-side and fully provisioned, we could not last long in the cold and rough water.

At night it is forbidden even to smoke on deck and there are no lights outside at all. The portholes are covered and we must go to bed at eleven o'clock. Daily at three we are to don our cork jackets and take part in the lifeboat drills in order to be prepared.

All these things are rather terrorizing now, if one stops to consider them, but doubtless in a day or so we shall be quite accustomed and think no more of it.

*Somewhere on the Atlantic, May 27.*

One has too much time to think out here. I shall be glad when we are over. The sea is very rough to-day and many of the party are seasick. In fact, most of the

## A PLEASANT EXPERIENCE

fellows I know are down below and extremely unhappy. I have somehow drifted through without feeling the roll, but my time may come.

One pleasant experience I have had so far at least. This morning, as I wandered about the boat on top deck, I came upon a miserable bundle of steamer-rug and girl and dog. The steamer-rug was new, the girl seven, and the dog two. It seemed the youngster had climbed up to see her doggy, who was kept up there, and was afraid to go down while the boat was pitching so.

Her name was — I swear it and can prove it — Doris. Doris what, I don't know. She is French, but speaks English a good deal better than I "parlez-vous-Français." I think we shall be good pals for the sake of the name if nothing else.

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

*May 30.*

How beautiful it is out here to-night! I have sat a long time on the deck looking back along our twisting wake to where the up-slanting horizon shuts out the western sea with a veil of pale night and barely showing stars. The moon, three quarters full, makes a broad rippling path across the easy-rolling water. People here and there upon the deck talk in low tones and laugh subduedly now and then. Above on the boat deck a dozen college fellows are singing songs softly and with harmony. Now a pall hangs over all. The necessity always of restraint and caution lays a heavy hand on hearts that would be gay.

*June 1.*

At least one letter of news I suppose should lie among those I send back, for you would doubtless like to know. Besides, the censor will probably need a rest

## ON THE WATCH FOR U-BOATS

after reading the others. We have not yet been informed what sort of things we should not write, so I will tell most of what I know and the Paris post-office can do the rest.

Have I told you how our gunners were constantly on watch and the pieces loaded — how the lights on deck are forbidden and the lifeboats swung overside? I have spoken of the lifeboat drills, and perhaps of the order to remain on deck fully dressed the last two nights, so there is little left to tell of the precautions taken against the submarines.

This boat was attacked on the last voyage by a U-boat and the crack gunner of the ship's crew sank the latter with two shots from the forward gun. The captain turned the boat quickly in the direction of the submarine and avoided the torpedo by about a hundred and fifty feet. It was rather a close shave, but an experience I

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

would n't mind having if equally successful. The French Government gives a prize of twenty-five thousand francs to each ship's crew that sinks a U-boat. In addition the passengers gave considerable, I understand.

There are three hundred ambulance men aboard, almost all college men, so we have a fairly good time, although no one seems inclined to much play. It is a rather serious crowd. There is a good deal of gambling, but very little drinking on board. The food is excellent and plentiful, which is saying a good deal considering the appetites such a gang can raise.

There are twenty-two women aboard — most of them old enough to know better. The only attractive girls speak French only, so my conversation is mostly limited to "Good-morning — how are you?" "Good-afternoon — it is a pleasant day," and "Good-night," after which the day's

## SHIPMATES

work being over, I promenade with some of the gang.

We are most all of us in uniform, so that it looks rather like a transport ship. The sea has been good to us, and I have never been really sick and most of the time have felt splendidly. Lots of fresh air and sleep have given me a chance to take on some much-needed weight. I am also somewhat tanned and altogether quite fit physically.

Bill Gemmill, George Scholes, and Bob Meyer, all U. of C. Dekes, are next to me in the corridor. One of my roomies is a Phi Delt from Wabash College by the name of Tate Carll. He and I went through high school together in Indianapolis, played on the same football team, and have always been good friends. Neither of us knew the other was going and did not meet till we went to our cabin for the night. It was a pleasant surprise, indeed.

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

The other fellows in this cabin are Humphreys, Phi Psi from Northwestern, and Ellis, Beta from Northwestern, and a Yale man by the name of Edwards. None of us have been ill and we have got along finely together. Things are pretty crowded but we all came prepared to rough it and don't mind much. Every cabin on the boat is taken, this being the largest passenger list come to France since the beginning of the war. We are also said to have the most valuable cargo.

We have a forward deckload of ether and high explosive chemicals said to be worth a large fortune themselves. There are many motor-trucks and hospital supplies aboard. I do not know whether we have any munitions or not, but suppose so.

Our distinguished passenger list includes M. Rossi, of the Metropolitan Opera Company; Lillian Geurze, a pretty little Win-

## SHIPMATES

ter Garden Danseuse; Miss Anne Morgan, daughter of the late J. P.; Mme. Gillmore; an unknown actress; a French consular official; a Count and Countess de Somebody; and a number of army men (French reservists).

The army men are second-class passengers, as they are on passes. We go down and talk to them often and find them mighty interesting. They tell us a good deal of conditions "out there" — sometimes with tears in their eyes.

They praise our service very nicely and all express the hope that they may see us. Their English and our French must be a ludicrous combination to any one who understands both well. However — I expect to be able at least to ask for my bath in French on the trip back.

Enough of this — I have rambled on at a greater length than I had thought.

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

*June 2, 1917.*

We are in the Bay of Biscay now — the danger zone for us, but only another day and night from port. There have been long, lazy days, although the last two have been rather apprehensive ones. Can you imagine how it seeps into one to have to carry a life-belt around with one all the time — to be fully dressed and ready to go overboard — to spend the night trying to sleep on the boards of the deck while those too nervous to sleep tramp endlessly by?

It has its funny side too, though. Big elephantine women become mobile mountains when swathed in the extra clothing they fully expect to need, and waddle around like clumsy ducks in a back-yard pond. People attempting to sleep in steamer-chairs topple over when the steamer gives an extra lurch and go sprawling across the deck.

## REACHING PORT

A thousand wild rumors float around and have credence here and there even when utterly ridiculous. No one really knows anything truly, as, for obvious reasons, no bulletins are given out. Ordinary compasses are useless in the presence of so much steel; so we know not by what route we came. Our course is a zigzag one, so that the sun and stars do not help us much, being now on the one bow, now on the other. The convoy told about at home has never materialized, although from time to time we pass other ships close at hand and signal for news.

*June 4, 1917.*

Safe in the harbor now after a rather sleepless night. Deck-chairs are hard, and the dodgings and twistings of the boat in its course were interesting enough in addition to keep one awake. We saw no submarines at all and kept in touch with the

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

French patrol by signals most of the latter part of the night. The dodging tactics were evidently resorted to to make us hard to follow or hard to hit if seen. As soon as the tide turns we shall go up the river to Bordeaux and on to Paris at once — another sleepless night. But then it is well to get used to that. Behind us in the harbor lie the spars of craft sunk by mines and submarines — suggestive of the fate we might have had.

Last night, as I wandered hither and thither on the boat, I found my little friend Doris awake and wandering about. I took her on my lap and told her fairy tales of the kind I liked as a child and some things from Kipling's "Just-So Stories." She finally went to sleep there and I held her a long time wondering many things.

I must go below and pack duffle-bags and so forth. I shall try to cable home as soon as I land this afternoon.

## ARRIVAL IN PARIS

*Paris, France, June 5, 1917.*

I got here to-day very tired after an all-night ride from Bordeaux. It is a good deal more than seventy-two hours since I have slept or changed my clothing, but I suppose I shall soon get used to that.

*Paris, June 9, 1917.*

I have spent most of the afternoon trying to find out if my cablegram had got through to you. My French was taxed to the breaking point in so doing, but a sufficient number of "oui's" finally convinced me that it had. This letter may not be a long one, as it is nearly time for me to go on guard duty, and I start toward the front to-morrow morning at seven o'clock. Out there, for the next two weeks at least, I shall be much too busy to write. Things are so tied up here that I cannot get an ambulance for about six weeks, so I am going to do relief driving in the transport

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

service — another new division of this service. This will be harder work than the other, but it is only temporary. Ambulance men work about three days and three nights a week with about a month off out of the six altogether, according to what they tell us here. During the two weeks I shall be in the transport I shall work seven days and four nights a week. The work is that of carrying up supplies from the dépôts to the concentration parks. It is hard, grueling work, without honor or glory, but France needs us and I am glad to do it for the little while at least.

I cannot tell you in so short a space all my first impressions of this beautiful country. We had no sleep the last two nights on the boat as we were forced to stay on decks through the danger zone. At four o'clock Monday afternoon we made the dock at Bordeaux after a run up the Gironde through the greenest and pret-

## BEGINNING WORK

tiest lands I ever saw. Our train left for Paris at ten-thirty that night, and, as we traveled third-class on our military *permissions*, we made no attempt to sleep, but had what I suppose few Americans have had — the privilege of traversing the château country in the moonlight.

We are quartered here in a very pretty private park of about twenty-five acres of sloping ground on the banks of the Seine just above the Trocadero. This is, of course, right in the middle of the more historic regions of Paris. During my work this week driving a *camion* I have seen many of the things worth seeing here and on my afternoon off visited several others. I must go now. There were no particular incidents of the trip worth reciting. I do not know by what route we came. I shall have to be very particular not to say the wrong things, so I shall not give you much news till I know what is proper to send.

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

My German name has handicapped me several times, but they have been convinced of my good faith eventually. God knows I wish I could do more for these people. Even this little while has taught me that they have given of the best they have; that no sacrifice is too great; that the best men of France are being killed for the sake of great ideals. Only now does one begin to realize what the war is really like. I hope that our own fair land will never have to suffer as has France, but may the day soon come when we prove to them at least that we are ready if necessary.

I am late. Au revoir.

*Tent 4, St. 3, A.F.S.*

*Somewhere in France.*

To-day we came up toward the front on slow-moving troop trains (two hundred of us) to take charge in a few days of eighty

## SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE

supply trucks driving for France. We debarked at a little village that had been fought over and largely deserted permanently in the early days of the war. Trenches and entanglements, shell-holes and ruins, were everywhere, and as we rolled across the hill country in transports a little later there were more and more of these things.

Here to-night, after half a day of hard work erecting tents, digging ditches, building kitchens and water-lines, we rest where a German field division had had its headquarters two years before. Nature has been kind and the ugly marks of the war's progress are overgrown with the close green foliage so prevalent in France.

Our company street is on a natural terrace of a great green-topped hill with the bare rocks rising a hundred feet behind us. Below us is the mansion house — our officers' quarters — and farther down still

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

the car park where many five-ton Pierce-Arrow trucks await us.

We can hear the booming of the big guns out beyond, and all the time hundreds, seemingly, of aeroplanes are humming past us overhead. We are in the war zone and close to our coming service, yet never have I camped in a more peaceful or more beautiful spot. It is like our Brown County in midsummer here and so pleasant it is harder to realize we are in the fighting than it was in Paris.

*Monday (June 11).*

Our work begins at five o'clock, and this morning before six we were started by motor to a French transport camp. A brave soldier, convalescent from wounds he had received in action, was to receive the Croix de Guerre, and we had been asked (a special favor to us) to take part in this ceremony. The men from the other

## A DECORATION CEREMONY

camps were there, too, making five hundred Americans in all. It was a thrilling thing itself to see the five hundred of us form a hollow square around the Stars and Stripes before the march. Our new uniforms looked neat and handsome and the sun shone pleasantly on dull-polished rifles and helmets as we stood at attention.

There were French soldiers, officers, and a band played the "Marseillaise" as the man to be decorated was escorted into the cleared space in the forest. The service was short and impressive consisting of a reading of the citation, a few words of presentation, the pinning-on of the cross, and the kiss on each cheek, while we and the French *poilus* stood at "present arms."

Afterward, we passed in review, had inspection by a French general, ate lunch, and had a short concert by the band before going to work hauling oil for our machines.

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

*Wednesday Night, June 13.*

To-night the big guns out there are tired of roaring at each other and are still. I am very glad, for it gives me a chance to forget the things of yesterday when I was nearer the front. I was prepared for a good deal, I think, before I went and the separate incidents did not disturb me much, but when I got home to record my impressions in my diary, and saw it all written down, it was depressing to find how much of it there was in this small section, where there is little activity, and to think how much there must be over all the front.

But here, when we rolled into the grounds as the dusk was settling, it was very different. Picture if you can the dense forest, with the château of white stone and roofed with blue tile set in a clearing. From each corner of the front of the house stretch long rows of brown

## AT A CHÂTEAU

army tents to where the hill rises sheer for a hundred feet beyond. Two hours ago there would have been goats feeding in the center park and peacocks and pheasants preening themselves on the lower terrace. Now it grows dark and they are gone.

The men are scattered about the grounds cooling off after a long drive that kept us out till nine o'clock. The stars are coming out and peace settles over us for the night. Another week of this and then no one knows where we shall be, for we are getting hardened rapidly and the time will soon come when we shall take up our full service sleeping and eating when and where we can.

*Somewhere in France, near Soissons,  
June 14, 1917.*

I am really at work over here now, although it is not nearly so hard as it will be later. You can imagine that I was much

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

disappointed to find on arriving in Paris that I could not get an ambulance for a long time, and that it was a choice of loafing in Paris or doing this transport work. I did not much want to come at first, feeling as I did that I had both a duty and a right to drive an ambulance. But I now realize how difficult it is to communicate facts about the service both from the difficulty of describing conditions adequately and of getting real information through the censorship. Further, having seen more of the war as it really is, I find that there is more need for men in this service, that we are more directly connected with the army and therefore better cared-for and fed, that the work is more regular, and, although harder, nearly as interesting. So I am content to stay here till I have word that my car is ready and I hope that I can work well here. I am pretty soft, but so are all eighty of us, and the

## TRAINING AND DRILLS

officers realize it well and are considerate. So far we have done no real working to the front, it being mostly training for five or six hours a day, and army drills and camp work after that. Our cars are five-ton Pierce-Arrow trucks which loaded weigh close to eleven tons — a considerable load to handle in these hills. But the cars are powerful brutes and built for it, and I shall soon get used to the hard work over the wheel.

Our officers all speak English and are fine fellows who are more than willing to help us in every way possible. Unfortunately, I left my French grammar in Paris and cannot use any of the three or four hours of loafing during the day for study that way, but my corporal is helping me while we are out on the road and I am picking up considerably.

Our camp is sixteen miles from the German first lines, within range of the “forty-

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

fives" if they wanted to shoot this far. Our tents are pitched on the terraced lawns of a château where two years ago the Germans had a field headquarters after having killed the family that lived in the place. There are peacocks and pheasants on the lawns and goats running loose in the courtyard. Back of us is a high wooded hill full of wild life. My team-mate caught a baby fox last night and we hope to be able to tame it. We may hear from its mother, however.

Last night and to-day there has been very heavy cannonading along our sector of the front, and this morning many ambulances came in. If the battle was important you will probably know it before we do. The only piece of news we have had since arriving in Paris was a bulletin of Constantine's abdication.

I have been in the trenches several times, but not in any active ones, you may

## HARD WORK

be sure. These were five miles back of the nearest artillery and had been abandoned a month ago. . . . There were both French and German ones and some barbed-wire entanglements. Things were pretty well shot to pieces all right.

To-morrow night we are to go out for an all-night drive without lights. I am going to turn in now and rest up for it. Please write me lots.

*Sunday Night, June 17.*

Each day here is so much like the other that I did not know that this was Sunday until I came to write and took out the calendar. One is always tired by evening here. All day our cars have run beneath burning summer skies and the foot-deep dust rose in such clouds as to hide us one from the other, though we were but fifty feet apart. The constant jar and the straining at the ponderous wheel had

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

wearied me till I could not have slept, so I took my writing-pad and pen and wandered alone out into the woods beyond the camp.

Sometimes when the day's work is over and we sit smoking in the dark the old, old home songs are softly sung. Another week and there will be all work and no play until time to go home. Then — oh, how eagerly we shall set our faces westward — how some of us greet the swift passage of the crowded days, knowing that each is a forward step to the 26th of November. For it is then — so our orders read — that we may start back if our service has been well performed. For most of the men, no doubt, this will not be the end of working in the war, but we are coming home, at least. France is a wonderful country, her people most valiant, but every man of us would rather go out to the sometimes dangerous work with the Stars and Stripes of

## A TRIP TOWARD THE LINES

our own home land waving from the flag-staff of headquarters.

We sent some pictures into Paris to-day to be developed. I shall send them on when they come back. Our uniforms are not white — that is merely a coating of dust. Also don't let the guns excite you — they are 1878 models and used only for drilling and as an extreme precaution on the road.

*Wednesday (June 20).*

Let me tell you of our first trip toward the lines the other day when we carried our first loads of supplies. It is, I guess, typical of them all except that most will be at night. The twenty cars of the train load at a supply park and slowly wind up and down through the hills, passing now and then long lines of marching men and crawling, horse-drawn convoys. As we swing away to the east the sound of the

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

guns grows nearer and aero patrols drone overhead.

It is the first time Americans have gone through this sector with supplies. I, fortunately, have the lead truck of the first rank and I have put a small flag — one of France and one of the home land — on the radiator. Troops see it and give us a cheer and a salute. Even French officers give us a good-natured wave of the hand and when the train stops on the wayside for a little while, women leave the ponderous ploughing oxen in the field and, gathering daisies and poppies from the roadside, throw them to us, shouting “Vive l’Américain.”

Soon they will be used to us, and as many more come on, will cease to cheer, but it is good to know that we have been thus looked for.

We roll along through narrow, fertile valleys or labor over wooded hills, all full

## SHELL-RIDDLED SOISSONS

of peace and shaded solitude — the distant roaring of the guns seeming more like the portentous mutterings of an oncoming thunder-storm.

One last hill and a curve in the road and we enter Soissons — shell-riddled since the early war. Here trenches line the road and gut the untilled fields. Long miles of barbed wire in quadrupled rows rust in the weather, and shell-pits hold their tiny lakes of filthy water.

Beneath the trees at intervals one passes many, many graves, each marked with the simple cross of laths and France's colors. Here and there are names of the fallen ones, but mostly only "twelve braves fallen for France," or something similar.

Again we go into the hills over roads new-made since shells and trenches cut them up. Around is desolation terrible — stark trunks remain of once fine forest

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

trees and fields are torn to bits past all reclaim. German signs still line the roads, and on a stop we collect from their trenches many relics, but pass quickly by the places where their dead were put.

Vondron lies just beyond, and where three thousand souls once lived in that sweet rural peace such as France only knows, no single wall stands whole.

Now we come closer to the fight — now and then even within sight, from the hill-tops, of the smoking batteries. Our point of return is reached without having been near enough to see any of the battle-line, and so they say it will always be. There is more danger, we are told, of going into the ditch and getting a nasty spill than of being hit by shells. We go no closer than the ambulances and but few are even hurt. There is but little chance of winning honor and the work is harder far; but having come to do the best I might in the

## BATTLE-FIELD FLOWERS

little while, I am willing to be a plugger for that long.

Coming by another road, for traffic goes but one way on each, here we pass the wounded and the dying and the signs of war, till, as the sun rolls from the top of the most distant hill, we make our way through painted picture-lands whose father artist has taken from the rainbow his fine pigments and wrought a master work. Flashes of gold and lighter green of the fields stand out against the deep rich color of the distant forests. Field flowers of blue and of white are everywhere, while Nature, in her sense of the fitness of things, has lined the old abandoned trenches with great-cupped poppies — blood red.

Such is the land. The day's tasks are over and we are rolling to our home by the broad highway eagerly forgetting the land "out yonder."

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

*June 24, 1917.*

It is Sunday again. Another week of unnamed, undated days of work has made its rapid passage. Four days it has rained incessantly. Our canvas walls leak and steam and sweat — little pools form on the ground, and our clothes and us are never dry. The real work started this week, our probation period being over — started in a sea of mud. The burdened trucks slide down the soft hill roads, sometimes sideways, sometimes entirely backwards — skidding this way or that and snapping heavy skid chains like so much twine. Uphill it is low-gear all the time, while the motor foams and boils, inching along now and then with a line thrown round a tree — spending hours where a day before only minutes had been needed.

Hard, tiresome days these four have been, but it has been a relief from the inaction (comparatively speaking) of the

## WORK WITHOUT SLEEP

training period. And it is good to come back to quarters knowing that one has really accomplished a very little something in this gigantic struggle.

For the past twenty-eight hours we have been on our cars without sleep, with such food as we brought along, — driving without lights part of the time, which is a nervous business in the rain and mud. When I came in at midnight a little while ago, wet through and with no dry place to sleep, dispirited by the rain and tired for the lack of sleep, imagine how it cheered to find letters from home.

*Monday, June 25, 1917.*

Things have settled down to a fair semblance of routine, although our life is hardly regular enough to be called routine. Our probation period was over last week and after a long series of trial runs we have been put to work. In a day or so

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

we shall be transferred to another section via Paris. Then things will begin in earnest.

Were it not for my connection with the ambulance, I would, I think, much prefer to stay in this work rather than go to the ambulance-driving when my car is ready. Ambulance men have too much loafing time under present conditions, and loafing in this country in these times is neither an interesting nor a wholesome business. That service has been over-recruited, too, and there are many more sections than will probably be needed before our army comes, and it will bring enough ambulances with them, so this service, where men are really needed to take the place of the Frenchmen who have been killed or worn out in the war at the truck wheels, is important.

We are well fed and decently treated; the work is interesting and if not as much

## THE CENSORSHIP

honored is at least as honorable and more necessary.

I wish I could tell you all of the things I am seeing and doing, but suppose there are good reasons for our being instructed to refrain from too detailed descriptions. I have written to Dick Little that I can't send any news stories for the "Herald."

I think I am beginning to understand more why we are in the war and to feel very glad that we are as a nation come to the aid of France in this hour of need. One cannot be angry over false or inaccurate statements about the conditions of service or costs when there is so much to do. I hardly see how the French can have kept at it so long and so hard and prepare still to go on.

We shan't see much fighting, I suppose, — at least the trench fighting. Several times the truck trains have been stopped near abandoned German trenches and we

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

have collected a carload of trophies — helmets, bayonets, spades, etc. We pass through many ruined towns in many of which not a wall stands. Once or twice we have seen puffs of smoke from batteries and we can always hear the roar in the distance.

This morning a Boche bombing-machine flew over camp in too much haste to send us a message. There are some aeroplane escadrilles near by and the German planes had sought them out. Two Spads went in pursuit and the anti-aeroplane guns opened up fire, but we do not know what the outcome was, as the machine dived into a cloud-bank.

Never be alarmed unless two weeks go by without my writing some of you, as I may not always make the boat.

Lots of love.

## CRAONNE

*July 3, 1917.*

As I write I am sitting on a shock of wheat thrown down from a harvest-pile in a hilltop field. It is rather a rendezvous of mine, for the hill is high and one can see for many miles — to the north and east the smoke of battle, to the south and west such fertile valleys as remind me of the hilly south of our own State. The hour is early, for at three this morning I awoke from my first full night's sleep in many a day, and breakfasted and sent away some cars. They are keeping us pretty busy now. There has been much fighting hereabouts, of which you will have read and no doubt will forget before this reaches you. There is Craonne, between the Chemin des Dames and the twin plateaus of Chartinbrise and Californie, where the French have withstood such tremendous onslaughts in the last two weeks — and all of it we have served a little with our trucks.

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

Our ambulances were delayed, so I joined one hundred and fifty fellows who were going up to drive the big army trucks. There are five hundred of us now from Yale, Cornell, Dartmouth, Chicago, California, and a dozen other universities, and though we were a bit disappointed in the change at first, we feel now that we are helping France the most by doing so.

I suppose that we never can make the name that the Ambulance Corps did for itself. There is none of the romance or glory, no chance of gaining the distinction that the men who came before us honorably did with their little ambulances. Mostly it is just hard, plugging, jarring, straining labor with the five-ton loads, which may be anything from logs to shells and nitroglycerin.

It rains too much, and even the excellent roads here cannot stand the traffic. Sometimes for a week at a time the game

## UNDER FIRE

is mostly sliding sideways down the hills, with your eyes shut and praying that the other fellow keeps his distance. When we go up close, it is always at night, and there are no lights—even cigarettes—allowed, so we stand a pretty good chance of sliding into the man ahead, although the night work is getting to be more or less instinctive now.

I no longer drive very much, as I am a brigadier of the company, and am kept jumping on and off the trucks a good deal, but often on the way home, when we have been going pretty hard for a bit and I have not slept, I wake from a doze at a slackening of the speed and make a frantic grab for the brake lever which is not there, from the habit of running in the dark.

You will want to know if we have been under fire, I suppose, and what it felt like. The answer is yes, but the experience was much less terrifying, even on the first oc-

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

currence, than I had anticipated. Several of us (I for one) have nicks in our steel helmets which we hope some day to display. But, of course, those pieces were pretty well spent before they came, or I would not be writing this letter.

One man in another company is reported to have complained to his lieutenant that some one from our company had thrown rocks at him the other day. Investigation showed the top of his car well shredded and eleven pieces of shell in the bottom of the car.

But somehow they do not seem to get us. The men take unholy chances sometimes, for the sake of seeing all there is to see, but a fool's Providence takes care of those who do such things, and no one has been hurt so far.

Tell the anxious ones at home who think this work more perilous than the ambulance that it is not so. We go to the same

## ALMOST OUTSIDERS

places they do every day, and one has only to see a big shell burst to know that if we are to meet one it does not matter what our load is.

I suppose we are all to become fatalists by now with regard to life and death. It is well, for the philosophy will let us live each day with all the fervor in us, and it leaves no place for cowardice. There are loved ones at home whose memory will not let us want to die, but if it comes we can count our lives well spent, at least. Sometimes it galls a bit to know that we are almost outsiders in the war, that though we carry guns and drill and stand our turn at guard, are in the vast army of France, we are not really of it. To see the things the war has done to France; to drop down into some back trench and talk to men who have been where hell was popping hour by hour; to pass the miles of roadside unnamed graves, each in part responsible

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

for the black that veils the womanhood of France; to see a little town that once housed happy families made into dust before your eyes, or view the pitiable human dust of wounded, worn-out men that straggle ever back to rest while others take their places, — it makes you want to fight and question why you have a right to stay unscathed.

The war as we can see it here is far from being fought all out. America will have to give at least a part as much as France, and do without and die and sorrow as the present generation never has. Many of us who are the young men of the day will have to give the best we have to pay. There is no more glamour about it all any more, no glory. The things I have seen in days to come will make me shudder when I have time to think. But I guess I am willing enough to "carry on," at that. The best of it out here is that we do not

## LAUGHTER AND FUN

have time to think, but feel somehow a sense of duty that sends us along well enough content, and we live more or less on the day-to-day excitement. Besides, you are not to think we live in calm enough to permit of such speculation as I have indulged in this early hour to-day. Mostly it is laughter and joke about the things that happen, no matter how serious they may be, and sing a bit at night.

Sometimes, when some one is laid up for a day or so, he breaks out with a poem or a song or adds some new choice bit to our atrocious slang. Altogether, perhaps the fun is a bit unreal, born of the reactions from the cessation of the crash and rush of wind and shock of the big guns up front. But we are all right, and for the time, at least, we would not change places with our own army, for we are having a lot of action. Later, perhaps, we can join them when they are doing things. I hope so.

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

Since writing the foregoing, two men have come in rather badly dazed from catching a pair of spent balls in the side of the head. I have given them first aid and shipped them off to the hospital — it is nothing much, but it spoils our record. Except for three broken arms there had been no other injuries so far.

*July 4, 1917.*

We are in the thick of it nowadays and working pretty hard. To-day all France is honoring our independence, and we have a partial holiday, although some of the work must be done.

This morning ten companies of the transport men were reviewed and addressed by our French Chief, Captain Mallet, and this afternoon there is to be a ball game, but I have some office work to do and shall probably not go.

We have new quarters since yesterday

## WORKING AT NIGHT

which took the place of the damnable tents we had at the other camp. It rains here very much and, except for the day I had in Paris, my clothing has not been dry in three weeks. Here we sleep in "camionnettes," or covered auto-trailers which are high, dry, and warmer.

Since I have become a corporal, I no longer drive, so that I do not work so hard as to miss the sleep I am losing. We work largely at night and without lights. One hardly knows whether to be glad or not for the moonlight, for while it makes the driving easier, it makes one a good target also. However, we are pretty small objects from a fast-moving aeroplane, and though the Boches fly over us now and then, they have never tried to hit us. We were in rather a nasty place last night when a Boche was bombing a quarry on one side of us and the French were firing upon an aeroplane which was directly

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

over us. We did some lively moving for five minutes, and got out of it nicely, but it was interesting to say the least.

We see many air battles almost daily, but seldom know how they come out. We have seen one German machine fall in flames after being hit by a "seventy-five" shell, and last night about ten o'clock we saw searchlights and star shells employed in finding a fleet of Boche planes as they flew over the lines. The lines are only three to six miles away and by climbing a hill it is easy to see the shells bursting. There are ambulance sections nearby and we work under the same conditions and in the same radius.

I have written to Chicago about staying in this service rather than going to the Ambulance Corps when I can get a car. I have learned this game now, and would have to waste more valuable time learning the other. It is, moreover, easy to see that

## NEED OF LETTERS

men are more needed here, as the Ambulance service is too well recruited.

I have been made one of the four non-com. officers of the company with a chance to do better and want to stay. My mind is made up about the business unless the frat. objects and I don't think it will.<sup>1</sup>

I have had no mail for three weeks and only one letter from any of you. I hope more are coming, for they are badly needed out here.

I have been remarkably well and had no colds during the rainy spell. I also have a charming young mustache and a good coat of tan, not to mention ten pounds to the good.

*Monday, July 9, 1917.*

Here follows a little résumé of my sojourn to date, taken in part from my diary

<sup>1</sup> The author was sent to drive an ambulance furnished and maintained by the Phi Delta Theta fraternity. (*Editor.*)

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

which will tell best what I have been doing.

*June 4.* Landed at Bordeaux and took midnight train for Paris, riding in military carriages and without having slept for three nights. Was in Paris three days, during one of which I slept and one I went sight-seeing and shopping, and the other merely sight-seeing. Paris is not very gay just now — everything stops at nine-thirty, even the street-cars and subways. I had the extreme good fortune aboard ship to be able to serve a French-American lady, a Madame Crane, who knew the better side of Paris well and showed us many things and gained us entrée into many places otherwise closed at this time. It was she also who made it possible to send the letter back by the French official and she who gave me the truth about the conditions here. I think I understand the war a good deal better from having seen

## THE AMBULANCE SERVICE

it through the eyes of the French. The things I told you, if you got the letter, are far from being an exaggeration.

After my three days in Paris I went, together with several hundred others, to a training-camp which I have described elsewhere. Two weeks of practice runs, and we were put to hauling well behind the lines till we proved up. Meanwhile we were organized into sections of twenty cars each with forty drivers and five officers. My section was the first to get away from our particular concentration camp, and now lies in a town about five miles behind the lines.

Unless I hear to the contrary, I shall not go into the ambulance service at all — it is too much waste of time and this is more important. There are now so many ambulances that they work only about a third of the time if they are lucky. If you are as unlucky as some of the boys who

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

came on the Rochambeau, you get attached to a section *en repos* and spend months loafing.

We have had only two days off so far and have worked up to eighteen hours at a stretch and then gone right out again. It is better so — we came to work and we are getting it with plenty of chance to rest after a day or so. If it would quit raining four days out of seven (this being the dry season here), we could n't find a kick in the world. Since we got out of the leaky tents we had and moved into our palatial auto-trailers, we have been decently dry at home at least.

Of course you will want to know if I've been under fire and in danger. I suppose one would say yes, although it did n't seem very dangerous. You see, they are not anxious to have us killed or lose their expensive machines particularly; so they don't make us take very grave chances.

## DANGERS

There is no chance for us to go astray prowling around the front, as it is well guarded against wanderers. It is only at night that we go up to the trenches, and then along screened roads and without lights, so it is only by the wildest chance that they could get to us on the road.

The dépôts where we unload get hit pretty often, but as soon as a shelling starts, we are ordered into dugouts till it is over. There is plenty of time, for the first shells are always wild and you can hear any of them coming long enough to duck. Shrapnel has landed above us and around us and scattered harmlessly once or twice when we were in the dugouts, and I have picked up pieces still warm. They tell us, however, that we will seldom get to see things that close. On this occasion we were only two miles from the German batteries and were way in front of the French batteries.

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

*July 15, 1917.*

I have acted on a good hunch and brought my writing-pad along with me on the road. We have been standing here for an hour waiting to be unloaded of our five tons each of barbed wire. In front and behind, as far as the eye can see, there are long lines of trucks loaded with the various materials of war, while the returning trains raise such clouds of dust that I find it necessary to wear my goggles while I write.

It is a great job we have here. Four hundred of us Americans are quartered in one town, living in the trailers of our machines. Every day or night (and sometimes both) we go in groups of six to eighteen cars each up to supply dépôts and from there on to the front.

We have been up to the third-line trenches in the hill country and in front of the heavy-gun batteries. Several times

## AN AIR BATTLE

each day we see aero-battles either between Boches and French planes or Boche planes and the French batteries of "seventy-fives." Last night there was one of the biggest air battles of the war only about three miles away, and it was a wonderful sight. Hearing the heavy bombardment, we ran up the hillside and saw seven huge searchlights playing upon a fleet of Boche planes. There were huge white star shells which followed the flight of the planes and about twenty batteries of "seventy-fives" sought for the range. It was brilliant moonlight and it was now and then easy to see the German machines when they came our way flying quite low.

This is only one of the many interesting and sometimes exciting incidents of the work. We go where we are told, the cars are very good, and the men work well and are happy. The hours are long and irregular, but it does n't matter, and every day

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

I am glad to be here except that I often long for my friends and the days that used to be. However, when I've done at least the first round of my bit, I can come home again and the future is long.

I have had no letters for three weeks — perhaps they will soon come. I hope so, for it is mighty good to get them out here.

*July 21.*

It begins to look as if my letters had been held up some place along the line, for I've had only one that came nearly a month ago. One appreciates them a lot out here, I can tell you, and I hope they soon come through.

My letters to you have not had much news in them so far, I know, — they've been written hurriedly and there is n't much to tell that would be allowed, I suppose. We are working very hard now, but I draw a five days' "vacation" to serve as

## SEAS OF AWFULNESS

the American non-com. aide on the staff. There is considerable running around to do and we have to go to places in the little Ford where the big trucks can't travel.

I have seen a little bit of everything doing now, I guess, except the actual trench fighting and have been in the third-line trenches — nearer I shall not go, for “safety first.”

One can't help having a little “lost feeling” in being so quickly plunged into such seas of awfulness and I suppose the experience sobers and ages one as nothing else can.

It is indescribable — often nauseating to some of the weaker of us. Perhaps it is well that the world is not allowed to know all the truth about Belgium's sufferings at Germany's hand. Perhaps it is well that the life in the trenches is only vaguely pictured, and that those who love things beautiful cannot see Rheims, for instance,

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

as I saw it distantly yesterday — a dust-heap disturbed twelve to twenty hundred times a day by German shells.

One cannot imagine what a single shell can do till he has seen one burst. The other night, when we were up with fourteen cars to serve a new sortie very close up, we took refuge in a Red Cross *poste de secours* while shells were falling in a stone courtyard beyond. The destruction was enormous and fragments struck above us nearly a thousand feet away with wounding force.

It is not as terrifying to be under fire as I had thought it would be, but then we've never had it very bad and we play it pretty safe by taking two cars at a time past dangerous points during intervals in the firing.

Some of the fellows are inclined to be foolish at times, but Providence guides them in some mysterious way, and out of

## FRENCH TOBACCO

all the men who have served since the service was started, not one man has been injured in his *camion*.

You doubtless had the reports that were in the Chicago and New York papers that the Rochambeau had been hit on our way over, but there was no truth to the report. The ship did catch on fire about five hours out, but we did n't know it till we made dock. We had to leave the pier before the hatches were taken off and saw nothing of the fire, although it burned the forward part pretty badly.

Please try to get some cigarettes and tobacco through to me. The French Government will now frank them through to our military address if our postal authorities will take them. French tobacco hardly suits our palates and the worst kinds and cheapest are about equivalent in price to "Pall Mall" as a steady diet. Pipe tobacco is out of the question.

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

Pardon the disparity in note-papers. Most of mine has become hopelessly damaged by the incessant rains and I use what I can get.

Write soon, be good, don't worry, for I am "more weller" than I've been in years and working hard enough to keep happy in spite of anything over here. I get pretty homesick once in a while for you all and David in particular. Tell the Imp<sup>1</sup> to put some chewing-gum and chocolate in his suitcase, for he can't buy the former and the latter costs us thirty cents a cake for the small size.

*Sunday, July 23.*

I have been too tired to write these last few days. Tired from working long, long hours and steadily, for two of our officers are out of the game for a while — one with a broken arm and one sick — and much

<sup>1</sup> David.

## THE BATTLE OF CRAONNE

has fallen on me to do. There has been a battle — you will have read of it and forgotten it before this comes — at Craonne and Cerny and we have served a little bit in it by day and night, going as close as we dared and catching now and then a glimpse of it from some hilltop.

But now with this Sunday and to-morrow comes a needed rest, for I've been put on the "Service de Jour" for five days and stay in camp as an American non-com. aide on the staff.

To-night the battle sounds are stilled out yonder and I have sat upon the hilltop looking down the long deep valley, where, in spite of all that threatens it so close, peace reigns and the ripe fields shine golden when the sun goes down. The dusk has given way to dark, but I have lingered on beneath an overhanging shelf of rock and write now with a wavering gas torch beside me.

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

The first two months are gone, and I am happy in the work if you can call it happiness to serve, working hard, and trying to do well. I've wondered if you thought it strange that, having come to help in saving men from battlefields, I have so calmly turned to this more deadly work of hauling ammunition. But I'm sure that you must understand that I have found it best, and here can do the most in the time I have. I've told you before how it was liberating men my own father's age from hard, rough work to go back to their farms. I've told you that we from a race bred amidst things mechanical have taken hold and work with better speed and skill than they could ever manage who were here before. It's less humane, we see the fighting side of the war more than the other and are of the fighting force, but it is best. Out here one faces issues squarely — one has to. Each day of the last five,

## THE BATTLE OF CRAONNE

when I have had the running of eighteen to twenty-four machines, I have had to make decisions that sometimes balanced the safety of my comrades. Now the things I used to ponder over I know about.

There is some talk current that our army plans to take the service over, and then doubtless I shall go back to the ambulance service if there are cars (seventy-five were sunk last week). But it may be that my time will be up before this comes around, if at all.

*Sunday, July 29.*

It seems as if we could n't even sign ourselves "Somewhere in France" any more, for we are everywhere every day. We have been continuously on the road. There is a terrible battle on up ahead — you will have read of it — on the Craonne Plateau. We don't get much authentic news, but an English paper only two days

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

old that drifted into camp yesterday called it "a second Verdun," and we are hauling thousands and thousands of shells. For the past three days we have been in no more than four consecutive hours in which we had to get fuel, food, and provisions for the next trip.

It has been pretty hard to keep up so long, of course, and more than once, as I chased up and down the line in the "flivver," I discovered drivers wobbling about on the road nearly asleep. We have an accident or two at night. A car on which I was riding the other night met eight runaway horses (four of them mounted) hitched to a gun and dropping downhill at an awful speed. It was too dark to see them coming, but we heard the frantic shouting and whistling by the drivers and took a fifteen-foot embankment through a stone wall and a telephone post to keep from being hit. Fortunately, there was no

## ROAD ACCIDENTS

car behind us, and they went on safely until stopped — it would n't have been nice for the eight horses and four men to get caught between that truck and the heavy gun at the speed everybody was going. The car had a slightly bent bumper and a badly wrecked motor from going through that wall and the pole, but went home under its own power after four others had been hitched on to pull it up the bank. I had been slightly sleeping and was strapped in, as a result of which I got a bruised chin when it was snapped down against my knees by the shock. The other men were thrown clear and not hurt.

A car caught on fire this morning, but the fifth fire-extinguisher we tried worked all right. The night before one of our machines was in collision with another and the driver only had his finger cut from the back shock of the wheel. You see there is plenty of excitement, but nobody is ever

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

much hurt. Indeed, it is remarkable considering what it means for miles upon miles of *camions* going one way to be passing equal numbers going the other.

I suppose one can't realize the magnitude of all this till one sees it. Can you imagine all the traffic on Michigan Boulevard turned into trucks and horses going on roads one third as wide as it is, day and night? Can you imagine this happening on every road going up to the front in a distance greater than that from Indianapolis to Chicago? The other day we passed five solid miles of horses and guns going up — it is not an uncommon sight, but a wonderful one. Think what it takes to feed that many men and horses, then multiply by thousands. Think that beyond the rail terminals it must all be hauled by horses and motor-car. Then there are the shells. We are only one section of twenty-four cars out of more

## MAGNITUDE OF THE WORK

than two hundred thousand, yet every time we load with shells the load, exclusive of the cars, which are exceedingly valuable, is between \$78,000 and \$100,000 worth, depending on the kind. We are learning to shrug our shoulders and say, *C'est la guerre!* in the best French fashion now to almost everything that goes wrong.

We are beginning really to see the war now. Things that I had only dimly realized are too fully apparent to be misunderstood. This is the biggest battle since the spring drives and we are pretty close to it — it is beyond words.

*July 30.*

To-day has been one of happy surprises all through. I did n't get the sleep I had hoped for last night, but got in about four o'clock this morning to find two letters from home, and one promised me photo-

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

graphs; I do hope they come soon, for I want them very much.

My next surprise was to get eight whole hours of delicious sleep that put me in good shape for the day's run, which was a short one. After seeing the convoy safely started home, I got permission to take one of the staff cars and go to Compiègne, some forty miles away, for much-needed medical supplies (I am playing doctor here for the little cuts and things), and there I met my little friend Doris again. I had never thought to ask where she lived, and perhaps should not have seen her if she had n't hailed me from a carriage with a good old American "Hello, Johnny!" She was with her father and mother to whom she introduced me rather embarrassingly as "the man that kissed me good-bye at Bordeaux." Her father is a captain, and talked to me quite cordially in very good English, but I had to

## DORIS AGAIN

hurry away much before I wanted to. I promised Doris that I would come back some day and tell her the story of how the elephant got his nose and about the ride of the Brushwood Boy again, and rode away with her shaking her little yellow head at me and calling me "méchant" for scaring her father's horse with my exhaust. The little incident, reminding me so much of other things and breaking so pleasantly in on the war business, was very sweet. Oh, yes! and she asked me if my Doris wrote me letters and I was very glad to tell her yes, indeed! She was very proud of her father, and he did look fine in his uniform.

And to go on — when I got home about nine o'clock there was a package on my trunk which, opened, showed a beautiful honest-to-goodness Italian mandolin. I had said to my lieutenant a little while ago that I wished that I could have brought

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

mine, so he sent into Paris for one without telling me and had it brought to me with a nice little note appreciating the way I had handled some broken-down cars in a nasty bit of shell-fire, and saying it was a pleasure to do what he could for any of us at any time. And now it is long past time for "lights out."

*August 1.*

I put a shoulder out the day before yesterday and, of course, it had to be the right one. It is nothing much — we were in a bad hole and I was cranking, standing up to my knees in mud. The motor back-fired and I could n't get out of the way, so they had to snap the shoulder back into place and tie it there in a sling. I've slipped the arm out for a minute to write this, but it's a bit tortuous and I shan't try much.

I am glad for the rest, for we've been working awfully hard. This is n't very

## A DISLOCATED SHOULDER

painful, but I'm alone about eighteen hours a day except for the cook, who can't talk any English.

*August 6.*

A week has passed since I dislocated that shoulder and, of course, it is much better, though I still keep it in a sling and have been out only when it was necessary. It is still rather hard to make the fingers work to write.

The rainy season seems to have started, although it is not due for at least a month yet. We have had ten days of rain, and the bottom is beginning to drop out of even the best of the roads. It is very hard on both the men and the cars, of course, but *encore, c'est la guerre*. Some of our cars that went out at seven yesterday morning are not in yet — we had another load of “seventy-fives” to haul and had to leave them, but some one has gone

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

after them now. I rather dread getting back to that, but I've had a good deal more than my share of a "loaf."

Two letters came last night that helped a lonesome evening very much. I can't help but hope that C—— does n't pass for the officers' training, so that he may be spared this hell. It does n't seem, however, as if the war could keep up so long that he would ever get to the trenches, and the rest of it is not so bad.

*August 8.*

There is n't much to write these days — plenty of hard work and long hours take up most of the time. My shoulder is well now and I have gone back to the trenches.

It has been rainy and cold here steadily for some eight or ten days — the roads are awful going for the big trucks and the men come in so tired from a fifteen to

## DINNER WITH AN OFFICER

twenty hours' struggle that they flop into bed without even taking their boots off.

There has been plenty of action up here lately and some good friends in the ambulance service have been killed in the last ten days. We have been hauling ammunition and don't get up so far as the ambulances, but after the attack I suppose we will get our share of the bad places in hauling up engineering material for the new position.

We have had uncanny luck so far — only seven or eight hit in the whole five hundred of us in the transport so far and only two hospital cases in that number.

We are all surprisingly well and are pretty content with things as they are, although the work has been trying for the last two weeks.

I had dinner with a French artillery officer the other night in his dugout behind the battery of "one hundred and

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

fifty-fives" that lies over to one side of one of the parks. I had gone up ahead of a convoy with the lieutenant to locate a park we had never been to before and met the officer by chance on a hillside. He was most cordial and offered us a very decent meal with champagne, rum, and some very decent Dutch cigars afterward; where he got the latter I have no idea.

We had plenty of time, as we did not have to meet the convoy till dark (eight-thirty), so he took us up to the pits, showed us their maps and range-finders, and allowed us to fire the first two shots of the evening salvo. Many of the fellows have been treated very well also by other officers — apparently they think rather well of the service.

Time to go to work now. Good-night. (But while it is seven-thirty here, it is only one o'clock in the afternoon there, so it really is n't "good-night.")

## A SUGGESTION

*August 10.*

I'm feeling ever so much better now — shoulder all well and everything, except that I'm a bit tired from being out most all night on convoy. However, that's all in the job and the sun is shining, and this is Katharine's birthday at home, so there is nothing at all to do but be happy and write letters.

Speaking of things for the "tummy," I have instructed my orderly to post a notice to the effect that I am open to invitations to Christmas dinner anywhere in the United States of America, but will restrict it to —— county, state of ——, because I happen to remember something about boundary lines. While I'm handing out this advance dope, — I'm taking plenty of time because it will be two months before I can receive an invitation to accept, and it will take another month to send the acceptance back, —

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

while I'm handing out this dope, I would also suggest that you remove the front steps and put a ladder so I can mount as I do in my present home. Then get a full set of tin dishes and knives and forks, call me to mess by pounding on an old shell-case with a coal-shovel, serve me out of a tin dipper and put me in the back yard to eat it. Any old kind of a tin can will do to wash the dishes in; never mind a dish-towel — our best drivers are n't using them in France this season.

Never mind a bed: just give me a blanket and I'll use the floor — it's not too soft. I'll probably get up at five o'clock, but you will have to remind me to wash my face and shave. Water can't be wasted for such purposes here, but maybe I can learn again some day.

If you should have occasion to put me into an automobile, just take off the springs, put on a fifteen-mile-an-hour

## A BIRTHDAY LETTER

governor, and start me across lots through Lake E—— or any marshlands you may know of, and I shall feel at home.

By the way, I can't drink coffee unless it is made of ground acorns and chicory, and can't smoke anything but hay and mullen leaves mixed — *pas de vrai tabac*. Water, however, I think I shall appreciate — we get enough to remember what it tastes like, though the everlasting *pinard* (*vin rouge*) is safer as a steady diet.

It's hard sometimes to quit being serious when I write, but I want you to know that I'm not forgetting how to laugh out here when the biggest game is to get home from each trip with a whole skin.

*August 10.*

DEAR SIS: —

I found out by chance to-day that this was August 10th and remembered, of course, that it was your birthday. I can

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

send you the merest greeting from here, but with it goes the best wishes to you and love and hopes that the next will find us all together again.

I went back to the trucks yesterday (I had been using the lieut.'s flivver as easier riding on account of my bad shoulder).

To-day, as if in honor of your birthday, is the first time the sun has shown in ten days. We have had incessant rain and fog, and the bottom is gone from a lot of the roads. It is pretty wearing both on the drivers and the cars. I shudder to think of the tire bills that will have to come as a result of the skidding in the mud. Thank goodness, they are Government cars.

One of our cars got lost the other night and wandered clear up to the second line of trenches, but a fortunate fog kept it from being seen and blown up.

We have been awfully lucky all around. T.M. 184 has had only six men hit all to-

## THE LUCK OF T.M. 184

gether, and in each case the *éclats* barely nicked the skin. One man got caught between a truck and a freight car the other day, though, and I suppose he will die. He was in T.M. 133 and I did not know him.

Please write me as often as you can and don't mind if the letters are not always promptly answered. Sometimes we work for a couple of weeks in eighteen-to-twenty-seven-hour shifts and then have three or four days off, and it is at those times that I do most of my writing.

It is nearly three o'clock and we are due to take a bunch of stuff up to the ruins of an old castle in front of the batteries. I suppose it will take us at least all night. They shell the road a good bit, and we have to wait till the fire has slackened sometimes. I don't like the place much — some day we are n't going to have our luck with us when we go in there. The

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

captain does n't like it because he may lose some trucks — I have other reasons. *Mais — c'est la guerre !*

*August 12.*

I come to the end of a nearly perfect day as I write now, and I draw a little circle around the date of another Sunday nearer home with a glad tired feeling — happier than I have been for days. It was three o'clock this morning before our run of yesterday was finished. We had ridden all night under clear bright skies and once, whence we crossed a high foothill, it seemed almost that we were riding through the stars — in still, peaceful spaces where the mountains hid the sight and sound of war and blotted out all evil things. So when the last car had reported in and I was free, I could n't want to leave it all for sleep, but took instead a knapsack with a little food and crept

## A FRENCH SUNRISE

away up through the shadow of the highest hill, to wait the coming of the sun down the narrow valley to the east. How still and subtly the gray overcast the stars and the white dew-fogs of the night lifted and smoked away from the jewel-tipped fields below! How gently the red-pink clouds slid aside to let the big red ball roll through and change to glittering yellow in the clearer air, while coming it painted the hillsides downward to the valleys with its light! Then the world awoke to meet the morning. The birds came forth and sang as they soared and dipped among the fields, while all the world was for the moment gunless and still. Behind me my comrades slept the dead sleep of fatigue — unknowing. Out yonder men slept in sodden misery in holes — too tired to care if there was beauty near.

It is the war — and, oh, how terrible! Why should it be that these poor folk

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

must suffer so? Why should one have to think that all the blue farm smoke that rises here and there was made by fires that women built because their men had gone to help the stricken home land? Why, while the château over there stands out so white and pretty in the morning, must one know that the roof is gone and the walls on the other side were broken because an enemy came to destroy and kill and reap an awful harvest in the fields where grain has given way to the forms of men at the sowing-time?

It is this that can make us hate and "carry on"; that blinds our eyes to the purple of the gentians and the deep red of the poppies; that takes us away from the ones we love till the debt is paid. So be it for a little while longer, at least. So be it till I've done my bit and can come back; but to-day I've lived so far away from it and so near to home that I come back

## A SUNDAY SERVICE

home to-night with new heart and a better willingness to wait out my three months and do my best.

For to-day, when the air grew warm and I had eaten a little bit, I wandered away on a well-earned holiday to see the land as I liked. And as I walked I thought of many things and home of all things most.

Then at length I turned away from the road up a little path to the top of Mont Notre Dame where the villagers around about — old men and the women — were come to worship and to pray for France in the cathedral that stands there on the ancient rock.

I could n't help slipping into the doorway to see the service, for I knew it must be beautiful in there under the great stone arches that master builders had so lovingly wrought long, long ago in the days before the New World was even a myth. Somehow I knew that the priest would be

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

white-haired and majestic — that the place would be cool and dark with the stillness of dead centuries. Somehow I knew that only peace could reign in there and rest for tired hearts and holiness and love. But I could n't stay, — I, with my uniform of war, was out of place in there, — and I left it to its simple people to go into the sunshine and the woods. And the breath of the place, the mysticism of the rose-lit windows and the orange burning of the tapers, went with me as I left and brought me happiness of heart.

And to-night the world is the same. Up yonder on the slope the boys have gone to watch the star shells drift their lights along the front and the great searchlights flash across the sky. They are singing and the west breeze that brings the sound, carrying also the sweet odor of fresh-cut hay, is likewise of home. So it is of all such things that the day has been happily

## RED CROSS WORK

filled, and now in a little time the moon will come out and the bugle will send us to bed.

It is very splendid to be giving so much time to the Red Cross work — you will always be glad that you have in years to come; for that is the only truly glorious part of the war — the Red Cross. I have seen what that help means to the wounded, and I know. Your bit in the scheme of things is better than mine. More than once I have wished that I could be in that sort of work instead of helping the other way, but my part of giving is so small in a land that has given so much that it does n't matter. If they need us most here, ours is neither to reason why nor to ponder, but to do what we can to help in our allotted time. The Frenchman's philosophy is after all good. *C'est la guerre* — It is war. And if you are not in the trenches, you are lucky not to be; if you

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

are in the trenches, you are lucky not to be wounded; if you are wounded, you are lucky not to have been killed; if you have been killed, then you have died a good way in a good cause, and you are lucky to be out of it all. What happens in between does n't matter if you are doing your best honorably — it is war.

We can't help being fatalistic about our chances in things. If it is coming to us, then it will come in spite of anything, if not, so much the better. But I, for one, feel somehow sure that nothing is coming to me, and they believe very much in that sort of a "hunch" out here. I shall probably come home utterly without either glory or wounds so far as that is concerned.

They are still talking a good deal about the army taking the service over — there is nothing definite yet, but if they do it will mean I come home three or four weeks sooner. The ambulance service won't

## AN INSTRUMENT OF DESTINY

want us only for a month, so it will mean coming home.

There will be just a little regret in coming so, but, oh, how happy will I be to get back again!

*August 16.*

### *"An Instrument of Destiny"*

Nothing but good can befall the soldier, so he plays his part well. Come out of the ordeal safe and sound, he has had an experience in the light of which all life thereafter will be three times richer and more beautiful; wounded, he will have the esteem and admiration of all men and the approbation of his own conscience; killed, more than any other man, he can face the unknown without misgiving — that is, so long as death comes upon him in a moment of courage and enthusiasm, not of faltering or fear. . . . Never have I regretted what I am doing, nor would I at this moment be anywhere else than I am. I pity the poor civilians who shall never have seen or known the things that we have seen and known. Great as are the pleasures that they continue to enjoy and that we have renounced, the sense of being the instrument of Destiny is to me a source of greater satisfaction. (SEEGER.)

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

I don't remember when nor how this little clipping came to me. I found it, perused it lightly enough, then kept it to re-read many times, and to ponder more than once the words the poet wrote. He lived and died out here in that philosophy and found it good — even to that last hour, when men in battle come to choose this life or that death in brave deeds. In writing he has passed the clean thought on to those of us who find our power of words too slight to formulate a doctrine of our own to guide us through these fields. And I have made it mine.

I send it to you now because the time has come when you and I must face a little more squarely the eventuality for me of which he wrote himself.

. . . . .

The work out here, though not so continuous as it was, is becoming even a bit more dangerous for us, and the time may

## SEEGER'S PHILOSOPHY

come when the luck that guides us over roads on which other men fall will not be with us. Already there are those whom I had met in the quick and ready friendship which springs up out here, who have died. So far they have been all of the ambulance force and beyond the little circle I am in, but friends, nevertheless, whom one sees go down with vast regret, though there is little time for sorrowing.

Of us one only has been killed and eight have been hurt, but some strange power protects us somehow while Frenchmen fall around us — it is uncanny.

For me it is easy enough to look into the possibilities of the next three months with calmness and unfearing. The environment breeds such a spirit without recklessness, and such a philosophy as was Seeger's, and is mine, permits no such thing as cowardice. Regrets, if there are to be any in my service, are few and petty.

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

More than once, when with a too great imagination I have realized the true part of a munitions carrier, I have wished for the more humanitarian air that lives, supposedly at least, among the hospital folk.

Times I have felt unkindly toward — who pointed the way to the bigger, more exacting duty of this service. Times I have felt it was not enough to haul things by which men kill, but as though it were my place to take a gun from some old, worn-out man, who had a right to rest while I, who am young and strong, went in his place.

So much I have seen and calculated by the short measuring-stick of my newfound sense of judgment, that it still seems up to me to go in hard and die if need be, to help scourge the fields of France of the demonic rage of the Huns and the counter-rage of unstrung France and Britain.

Even here we are only in the outer ed-

## EDDIES OF THE WHIRLPOOL

dies of the awful whirlpool, but we see all and hear all and try to understand. It makes fighters of us all, but withal we long for peace and hate the wanton, ghastly horrors of the trench.

In an hour I go up to a place that I particularly hate. There have been two men there in charge who spoke English, and I was fond of having a glass of cognac and a cigarette with them when we went up. I saw the last one go, three nights ago — pieces of the same shell went through the top of one of my cars and rattled off the top of my helmet almost harmlessly.

*August 17.*

Just a little note now, for in a little while I must go on a ninety-mile run and it will probably be night again to-morrow before I get back. Here are some pictures. They are pretty bad, but we can't get any good print-paper over here — no chemicals.

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

*August 19.*

It took me two days instead of one to get back home again, and I am a bit tired, but could sleep now and then strapped to the seat on the way home. We ran into a cloudburst up in the hills and eleven cars out of eighteen mired down. Then there was heavy shelling of the road and we had to wait while it slackened and the road was cleared of a wrecked artillery train, but at last we made it and back.

As to the letter and package from Paris, you should feel highly honored, for the man who acted as my postman was a high man in the French diplomatic service — of the old royal blood. I met him, by the way, through the joint agency of Mme. Crane and Lady Austin, of the British Red Cross, who has done me several favors. I have had many interesting experiences of this sort that I shall tell you of some day.

## FRENCH EXHAUSTION

*August 20.*

“Os” appeared out of nowhere to-day and departed the same way after leaving your draft and promising to take this letter through to you; so I shall write you such things as I can that are not definitely military information. I have told you already, I think, that the war has killed France. We had n’t realized that at home, but I know now. Boys from sixteen to eighteen years and men above fifty have been called, and after them there is nothing left.

There can be no big French offensive, for the reserves are exhausted almost completely and there remain only enough troops to hold the present positions. This big battle on the Plateaux Hurtebrise and Californie has been almost entirely defensive and the resistance and cost of it have been terrible all along the Chemin des Dames. Things will stand still until our

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

army comes — every one seems to believe that; then a series of drives that will clear France of the Huns will occupy a year and a half or so. It seems impossible that it can take longer than that, for though the Germans may never be crushed, though the French probably never will set foot on German soil as victors, certainly the impossibility of any but an Allied victory must become apparent to even self-centered Prussia.

The situation is infinitely pathetic. Two great homesick, footsore armies wallow in the loathful mud, neither wanting nor daring to give in to the other. France is like a terrier dog with a throat-grip on a bigger dog to which she holds while she bleeds to death. Help from us must come soon if it is to be help.

But there is no lack of food certainly, even if the male population is now so far gone as to make a dubious future. We

## SICKNESS AND SANITATION

have enough certainly, though it is of a mean sort except the extra that we buy. If you sent me bread from home, it would get here sooner after baking than what we get here, and sometimes the mule and horseflesh are a little putrid, but that is army life and not altogether the war.

There is n't much sickness among us — only now and then some dysentery which I mostly treat myself (as I am more or less established as the camp "first-aider"). But among the French soldiers there is a terrible amount. The French army sanitation even in the infirmaries and hospitals is nauseating. Vermin are omnipresent, but with great care I have avoided everything but fleas, which will leave with cold weather and are not very annoying.

There was a very good map of the sector we are in on page 13 of the July 28 "Literary Digest," a copy of which came to

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

camp last night. Look up Rheims, Pouillon, Guyencourt, Berry-au-Bac, the whole territory along the Chemin des Dames, Soissons, Soupir, Coucy, and the territory north to the Oise River and you will know where we are working.

Things continue about the same — we are only under shell-fire about three nights a week, but it is hot enough while it lasts. We had our first experience with machine-gun fire this week, but it was passing a hundred feet over our heads and was therefore quite harmless. (It was missing a hilltop artillery road just ahead of us and coming on over the hill.)

I suppose we will move camp in about a week, as the Boche planes have the ten American camps in the town pretty well spotted. They've come close to getting to us several times, but have been beaten off. Apparently the French are unable to keep them from crossing the lines, for we

## THE NEED OF AVIATORS

see them continually. One was brought down a mile away one day last week after blowing up two of our captive balloons. I am repeatedly impressed that the most important thing for our country to do is to train thousands of aviators. French supremacy in the air is tottering for want of pilots.

Must run now — there is work to do. Luck to you all — try not to worry about things — they are n't so bad and the worst apparently is over for the year. Both sides are getting ready to dig in for the winter — work is slacking, but the rains are making it harder all the time, for the roads are getting bad.

I am wonderfully well and don't know I have bones and muscles and things any more. The jolting is getting us all a bit in the kidneys, but it is not serious yet and we are being treated.

I am glad of this chance to tell you what

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

I can. To be sure it is not much out of all we see and know, but we took the French army oath with regard to military operations.

*Later.*

I find there is still a little time to write before "Os" starts back, so here is for another little line. Camp life has been fairly exciting these last three days, for the Boche airmen evidently got some good photographs of our camp and have been trying to get to us. We have seen three planes brought down in rather thrilling duels and the Boche have retaliated by blowing up three observation balloons immediately in front of us. This last was accomplished in something under four minutes and was to say the least spectacular.

As a consequence we have literally taken to the woods. Our camp has been moved a mile or two up on to a hillside and in a grove of trees. Next week we are

## PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

to cover our trucks for the first time with "camouflage" (imitation of foliage and ground-work painted on the canvas).

I am glad I had not planned on going to the training-school, as orders went out to limit the class to twenty-five and the two men who went were sent back. I suppose, however, that they will get to go next month anyhow. Meantime I am automatically reduced two ranks, as they were my superiors. I am now brigadier again, but those things don't matter a great deal somehow any more.

"Os" says the army may take over the service in two months. It may be true. If it is, I am undecided what I shall do. Although we are much needed in the French army, the American army can get plenty of better drivers — professionals — who want the job, too. Colonel Wharton, Q.M.C., advised me to go home and get a commission in the transport service. He

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

says I will never be subject to draft, but since I have the experience and want to be in the army, they will doubtless waive the physical exams.

Must go —

*Friday, August 22.*

Good-morning —

I hope you like the stationery, for I started out after it at four bells this morning and rode seven miles and back on horseback to get it. It was the first time I had been on a horse for so long that I can't remember, and fourteen miles is not to be snickered at even if I did walk the beast most of the way back. There is a cavalry troop *en repos* about a quarter of a mile away, and I made it a visit last night in which I used all fifty of my French words and two packages of cigarettes for the loan of a horse and instruction in how to change speeds on it. I'm

## A PIANO IN A DUGOUT

going to try it again some day or so if my strength holds out.

Just now we are about to be busy moving camp, as the Boche *avions* have apparently located us and we don't want our sleep to be disturbed. Life has been far from dull this week. We have seen four of our own balloons blown up just in front of us and three German bombing-planes brought down around the camp. In order to discourage such intimacy we have selected a new site in a forest. We will take to the woods to-day.

An army Y.M.C.A. arrived with a tent, a movie show, a Victrola, and a piano. But then pianos are n't so rare. I was down thirty feet underground in an artillery dugout the other night and found one that had been salvaged from some place or other. The only man who could play it was killed while they were letting it down and its case was well nicked by bits of the

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

same shell, but it made a nice ornament they said. They even appreciated my efforts on it. I should like to go back sometime, but the road and the *obus parc* where we were going that night have both been blown up, so there is no chance.

The old adage, "Talking is still done by hand in France," has just been borne out again. I've had to tie up a Frenchman's elbow. He sprained it trying to translate "Crank up your motor" from French into English — that's a fact. I put on an elegant-looking bandage and got somebody to take a picture of it for him. This particular fellow is about as camera-shy as a thousand-dollar-a-week movie actor. But he has a heart of gold, for he will steal even the captain's automobile to go get us cigarettes and things when we can't get away to do it. His two favorite American expressions, out of a vocabulary of about a hundred words, are, "It is a gift," and

## TAKING TO THE WOODS

“You darn fool.” He uses both indiscriminately, but he is the best friend I have among the French in spite of the frequent use of the last compliment.

*August 26, 1917.*

We've just finished moving camp into the woods as a result of some aerial activities that threatened to get unpleasant. We are now halfway up a hillside in a pretty little grove of trees that hides us thoroughly.

Aside from that there is nothing much doing. We have been working in the daytime, which is not so very exciting, except for the air fights over us. We are just jogging along waiting for something to happen and praying we will be sent down to Verdun where there is a lively battle on.

Yesterday we were up near a battery of “two hundred and fortys” mounted on railway cars, and as I have nothing to do

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

in the *parcs* when there is no shelling, I went over and begged permission to shoot her a few times. There are two heavy armored cars on an inclined track and one stands out to one side to fire the piece by pulling a long chain. When "she" goes off, the recoil drives the two cars about thirty feet up the track, after which she rolls back down into place again. When the sun is shining, one can see the huge balls flying through the air until they go out of sight over the hill and break with a heavy roar. This was the first time I had fired a mounted battery piece and nearly completes the list.

O—— W—— is hereabouts on some sort of inspection trip and I have seen him once or twice. Incidentally he brought me some money from father, which, if already spent, was nevertheless welcome.

R—— L—— is over here as a correspondent for the "Chicago Tribune" and

## FRENCH TOBACCO AND WINE

says that France seems to be trying to cure the world both of the tobacco habit and the drink habit. Certainly the tobacco we get would make good stuff to fumigate a greenhouse, and if they would wait a week, the wine we drink, because we can't get water, would make a delectable vinegar.

I hope you have started something to smoke over to me. We have three more months from to-day, and if I don't get something from home pretty soon, I shall either have to give up smoking or give up using my lungs. Most anything comes through if you send it in packages not weighing over about four pounds. I understand that a clearing-house for packages to France has been established in New York and that we can get our stuff sent through it.

Time for supper — it is not interesting, but is at least filling, and as good, I sup-

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

pose, as possible. I had a letter from you last night mailed August 3. The bread we had for supper was dated July 19. *C'est la guerre!*

*August 27, 1917.*

I just finished a letter to K—— in which I wrote her that there was no news and now risk the monotony of repetition by telling you the same. We have n't worked at night for a week, and day runs are always much the same except for watching the aeroplanes and now and then shooting a few cannons here and there. I have even tried my hand with the anti-aircraft guns but could n't make anybody dodge. I saw a wonderful picture of our own cantonment that a Boche had taken before he was brought down a few days ago. They must have been taken from a long way up, but one could even count the stripes on the big Ameri-

## A BOCHE PLANE DOWNED

can flag we have. I'm rather glad he did n't get home with them, although he deserved to. We watched the battle from our *abris* and saw the plane fall wing over wing for nearly four thousand feet, then right itself and flutter to the ground. We learned afterward that the pilot had been killed and the observer had crawled over, pushed the pilot's body out of the way, and righted the plane, but to no avail because the motor had been wrecked by a shell.

I had my first smash-up on our last night trip. I don't drive much any more, for the non-com.'s don't have that in their duties, but I try to keep my hand in so that if anything happens, I can jump in and take a turn at it. This night we were passing a supply-train on a narrow road, and one team gave me no road to spare, but I went ahead. I collected two sets of fancy harness, parts of a wheel, a

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

lot of profanity that I did n't mind a bit since I could n't understand it, and had two horses fight for the honor of sitting in my lap. You can't hurt these big trucks, and I ducked before the horse climbed aboard. Nobody was hurt and everybody was used to having it happen. The matter was too small even to report on, but at home I suppose there would have been a crowd and a deuce of a racket. However, the penalty for showing a light along that piece of road would have been more than driving without one at home. *C'est la guerre!*

We are now established in our new home on the hillside and quite comfy. Thank goodness, the auto-trailers don't leak, for after ten days of sunshine, it has begun to rain eighteen hours out of twenty-four again. I shall send you some pictures soon. They are nice — the pictures.

## A RAINSTORM

At first the rains made the work more or less "blue" when they continued for such long stretches, but now I put on my raincoat as I dress and forget about it. In fact, I have two raincoats now and wear one over the other to keep dry.

*August 28, 1917.*

To-night the wind howls through the trees and whines at the windows while the rain splatters gustily against the walls. One has a cozy feeling even without a fireplace — shut in here secure from the storm. "Out there" the big guns are booming a furious barrage before some night attack and the ground even here trembles a little from the shock. For us it means work on the morrow to feed the guns and rehabilitate the reserve supply of shells. No doubt I shall be called off of my *repos* and by night to-morrow shall be very, very muddy and very, very tired.

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

It comes that way sometimes — days when getting up at three in the morning to jolt over untold miles of road, with rain beating in your face till it seems as if the skin would break, is discouraging. There are times when the incompatibility of French and English ways, the inefficiency of loading gangs, and the difficulty of talking a strange language about extraordinary things try the temper beyond endurance. And there are times after days like these — days that are eighteen hours long with discouragement in every one — when coming home to a muddy camp brings thoughts of some other home and the loved ones.

They say that the first rain of winter is here, though it seems strange, as this is the first of September only and everything still so green. But one can get used to anything in time. It no longer smarts as it did. Life is never really

## OUT ON PERMISSION

dull, though even excitement palls on one at times.

*September 9.*

I am writing this on the last day of my *permission*, and am in quite the happiest mood I have been in in France.

At the end of my first three months of service I was given seven days *repos* with three extra tacked on for good service, so set out to see France and I have made a fairly good job of it.

I wish you could have been along, for you would have enjoyed it as I did even if travelling conditions were a bit hard.

It was up in the north of France that I spent most of my time. The hills are steep and rugged there and the valleys deep and beautiful. Everything is so old and ingrown and peaceful that I should have been content merely to walk around there and forget things, but we had an

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

itinerary planned before leaving Paris and stuck to it.

We went to ——, a seaport base for the American sub-chasers, and the five of us immediately became the guests of the fleet. We were dined by various officers, who were anxious to hear our yarns of the life at the front, shown over the ship, and taken on trips through the submarine nest and the fairways of the harbor.

At night, on our last day there, we took a long ride, in the fast power boat that belonged to one of the ships, which I shall never forget for its grandeur. It was moonlight and a mist hung on the mountains and shadowed two century-old fortifications of the old harbor. Those things are worth while.

To be sure, there was one not altogether pleasant incident on that last night, but since my head has quit aching I rather value it as an experience to re-

## ROBBED

member. It was on the quay when we were put ashore that last night in considerable of a river fog that came down while we were putting in. I got lost from the others and was set upon from behind by some seafaring man. I rather think he meant to shanghai me until he found me in officer's uniform, but he contented himself with laying my scalp open in spite of my cap and taking about ninety francs off of me. I suppose I will have a neat little scar atop my dome, but he ought to have a broken wrist, for I fetched him what I fancy was a rather decent whack across the arm with a leaded cane I carry for such purposes at the front. After I got fixed up, it did n't matter much — I had to come "home" that much sooner, but that was all.

I shall be here overnight and go back to the front to-morrow.

It seems probable that the army will

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

get around to taking the service over in October. I suppose I had better stick it out here, for I will at least have some choice of service, while it seems probable I should be caught in the draft, eyes or no eyes, and put in the infantry at home. If it is possible, I should like to skip home for a week, but I don't know. The voyage is not so very dangerous — you will notice that they have not sunk many passenger ships lately and that the French line has lost only one boat in passenger traffic in the war.

Please write me about the draft and send me such clippings as you can. This being away from the front and living humanly again has brought thoughts of home folks and things pretty close. You've no idea how good it was to get up there among white people who talk your lingo after the endless days of trying to be French. It is difficult to write and

## SEEING FRANCE

talk good English after so much of the army slang and the French that we have.

Two years is a long time to look forward to home, but I do still, although I realize the chance of the game.

*September 9, 1917.*

I have been writing to father all about my trip north in France and what a splendid time I had running around among the officers of the fleet and seeing everything. You I will tell about my trip around Paris and Versailles in a Ford. It was also lots of fun. You see, I've made many friends over here who have been exceedingly kind to me and things come rather cheaply, so one can do a good deal on rather a small amount. We have free railway transportation anywhere in France, and hotel bills and *food* are all it costs us. The hotels are still fairly cheap, although the food costs money nowadays,

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

but I have completed ten days of travel now on something like forty-five dollars, which I drew in advance from the money deposited by the frat. And in that time I made a flying trip to Bordeaux by daylight and saw the great vineyards and the mountainside châteaux, and a trip to see a seaport in the extreme north.

But to return to Paris and Versailles — I have met a Lady Austin of the English Red Cross several times both near the front and in Paris and she has supplied me with bandages, medicines, etc., so I made a call upon her here after my return to Paris. She very kindly got me the use of one of the Fords that makes the rounds of the Paris hospitals every day, and before I was through with the joy-ride I found I had been all over Paris. After that she obtained for me permission to go to Versailles on board an ambulance, so I saw it too. You will have known all the

## SWEARING IN FRENCH

places I saw and doubtless they are unchanged. I have enjoyed every minute of my holiday and to-morrow I go back.

I had your letter containing the good news that honest-to-goodness tobacco was *en route*, and the clever clipping. The man who wrote the latter did n't say enough. I don't know what *patois* I speak — probably not any, for I get it from Normans, Bretons, Belgians, and Parisians, and it is doubtless an awful jumble, but it gets across. I am gradually learning to swear in French, but just now my efforts are so laughable that the person addressed usually laughs himself into such a good humor that there is no use swearing at him. *C'est la guerre!*

I nearly forgot to tell you the only amusing thing that has occurred to me in France. To begin at the beginning — when we were coming down from the north, we climbed into first-class compart-

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

ments, although our transportation called for third, and passed the buck back and forth and did n't understand French to such an extent that the train guard and all his crew gave us up and let us ride there. There were two American naval officers aboard who had cornered a mighty pretty English girl ambulance driver who was just back from "blighty" leave in London. One was sitting on each side of her in the carriage and they were having a gay little flirtation, but yours truly, not to be outdone, sat down across from her and started talking French to her, which neither of the officers could understand. Things progressed nicely as far as I was concerned, although I don't think the officers were entirely happy. However, the climax came when we were going through the mountains, and it was a regular burlesque sort of an incident. You know mountains have tunnels and tunnels

## AN ADVENTURE IN A TUNNEL

are only good for one thing when there is a pretty girl along. After going through a few tunnels, one comes to recognize the symptoms of the approach to one, but the navy men were n't wise. I was. I gave the lady the wink and just as we entered, she leaned forward and I leaned forward — all was dark — some big masculine hand grabbed mine and gave it an awful squeeze before the owner realized it was the wrong one. I heard the (although I was busy) impact of two bearded faces and a couple of muffled "damns." The next minute we shot out into the light and one of the Americans had moved to one corner — the other to the other; everybody was a bit flushed and uncomfortable-looking except the girl, who was lying back laughing at them. I was a bit fussed myself, but it was a nice kiss, anyhow.

*C'est la guerre!*

Maybe I had better explain my job —

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

you asked me what I was corporal of. I am enlisted in the French army until November 26. I was appointed a corporal in the French Army by my French captain.

Each of the twenty sections of the American group is composed of forty-five men, four non-coms. and an American who holds a lieutenancy. Over here we are called brigadiers instead of corporals, for we are attached to artillery divisions and artillery non-coms. are supposed to rank infantry non-coms. That is merely a matter of compliment to us, I suppose.

For a brief period I was promoted to the rank of top sergeant when the two sergeants were sent down to the officers' training-school. But through some error on the part of the authorities, their names had not been put on the roster at the school and they were sent back to the front again, so I was reduced again.

## THE DRAFT

Please, please try to get some dope on the draft and what they are going to do with us over here. I have refused to worry about it during my vacation, but I must do so now. It seems to be certain that we shall be taken over by the Government. They expect to enlist us the first of October, but will not pay us until our term is up with the service. They have been enlisting men for drivers at home with the rank of sergeant, but they will make us privates. The men who stayed at home and got their three months of theoretical training will officer us who have had six months' practical work in the field. I, for instance, know every road, every supply *parc*, every ammunition *dépôt* along seventy miles of front. I have worked hard on my French and can talk enough to get by now, but some man with a shoulder-strap but only a vocabulary of five words will get the advantage of my knowledge.

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

I have studied the methods of the *parcs* — how to load, the military rules of the road, how to save time, how to keep a convoy together — a dozen things that our army needs to know.

Perhaps you who don't realize over there what we are really up against may think this a selfish way to look at it — or unpatriotic even. But over here we know better than to want to die for our country in any capacity it wants us to. It is better to live for her, and the French teach us that a man is not giving his best except in the place where his mind is used best. It breeds an undemocratic atmosphere, perhaps, but it is the war. The question for France is solved by the more or less ignorant peasant class. Men who are educated — trained — are hard to replace.

But the people back home have n't realized the least thing of what the war is. They are playing petty politics — fooling

## POILU, THE DOG

away time every hour of which costs men's lives. Oh, wait till they've had a taste of it — wait till the first casualty list comes in — wait — for the Germans will know when our troops go in and they will get the awfulest bit of hell the master-demons can devise. If they go into a big battle there will be thirty or forty thousand — nearly as many as are here now — that will go. Then you will wake up over there — meantime, the men who are here in the infantry now will never go back home.

Did I ever tell you about my dog? I think not, for I have n't had him long, although I have known him since he was a fuzzy little puppy. His other master was French, so the little fellow does n't speak much English yet, and I talk to him mostly in French.

No dog, I think, was ever more appropriately named. Born with the army, of

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

parents that had lived in the trenches, — the veriest ragtag mongrel family tree, — he was brought back to grow up into a long, curly-haired, half-blond, half-brunette, clumsy puppy. “Poilu,” the name given the French soldier, means in the language “the hairy one.” So the little dog, which is mostly a bundle of hair, with four legs sticking out, and two big intelligent eyes to mark his head, is called “Poilu.” His other master is gone to Italy with his regiment. The dog stayed behind with me, and though he moped at first, I think he is happy now.

Poilu is very wise for his months. He always knows what one is talking about and he never asks foolish questions — is, in fact, that one being in France who does n't ask, “When do you think the war will end?”

Perhaps he knows and won't tell. I have asked him, but he only looked wise

## POILU, THE DOG

and wagged his tail intelligently. Everybody over here asks that question first; it's debated in the barracks eternally; it is asked across the table in every café; if you offer a Frenchman a lift, you do it in the certain knowledge that he will ask you that and expect a hopeful answer, such as "March" or "April."

But Poilu does n't care. War is rather a nice adventure. There is a wonderful amount of food to be had for the begging; there are many people who pet and pamper and don't scold if you curl up on their beds for a nap. The road out in front is a never-ending kaleidoscope of moving men and horses to bark at and other dogs to sniff at.

Military etiquette does n't bother at all. Poilu is the only poilu in all the armies that can rub against the legs of generals and sniff at them without rebuke. I would spend the rest of the war in *durance vile*

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

if I showed my contempt for a certain French captain the way Poilu does.

But Poilu is n't always haughty. When he has been naughty and knows it, he is very humble and apologetic and so appealing that it is extremely hard to be stern. Then, when he is a "good doggie," we go for walks along the river-bank and he finds sticks to be thrown.

Afterwards, when we are tired, we sit down on some stone or log and I smoke and he meditates. If there is no one around, I talk to him about home and ask him if he wants to go back with me and play with David and Charlotte.

He does n't understand all this very well because I say it in English, but he must know from the tone of my voice that it is something nice. He wags his tail and does his best to smile, and perhaps he thinks David and Charlotte are something good to eat, for he tries to stick his

## POILU, THE DOG

big ugly head into my pocket to find some sweets.

Anyway, whether he understands or not, I know it would be very nice to have him home, for I am rather fond of the little bundle and I would like to have him back with all my loved ones — and be there myself.

I shall not be able to bring him, I suppose, but he will always be a pleasant memory among many that aren't so pleasant.

Bless you, Poilu, — you are a good friend.

*September 10.*

Back to camp again to-day. There is no one here and the cook says the boys have been working like the devil, so I suppose my turn is coming to-morrow. I wrote you letters from the north of France and put them on board a United States de-

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

stroyer that was going home, but I heard yesterday that it has been ordered to England, so they will be a long time getting through.

I had a glorious time playing — forgot all my troubles and tired feeling and enjoyed life hugely. Now it is “back to the mines” again, and the traffic on the road here indicates that there will be plenty to do.

Even after the ten long days there were n't any letters. Surely they must come soon and I need them. The air is thick with rumors of this or that about conditions at home and they are discouraging. Too much politics, too much waste time — they've got to hurry.

And for myself the little undercurrent of longing is hard to stifle. This being with home folks and living humanly again, with the way things are going out here, is a little trying.

## IN CAMP AGAIN

September 11.

It was as I had thought — we are in for an awful round of work. The boys came in last night panting from exhaustion, their faces caked with grime and their eyes running little rivulets of tears from the gas-masks' suffocation. They must have had them on an awful length of time—it's no wonder they smashed two cars so badly that it took us till daylight to fix them.

It was my "trick" to-day, all right. I was "cocky" from my vacation and I got into rows with two military policemen and got reported and everything. *C'est la guerre*. (It was n't my fault, though, of course.)

This is sort of a snatched letter, but I imagine there won't be much time for the next two weeks. For the most part there is so little to tell that I write the letters more for the sake of letting you know I am all right.

Au revoir.

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

*September 16.*

I've had no letters for a good deal more than a week, but I suppose such things must wait till after this attack. We are having trouble to keep the cars going and the roads are so crowded nowadays that there are dozens of little accidents every night — collisions and such like that hurt nobody, but are hard on the machinery.

The section has been rolling twelve to eighteen hours a day for all but one of the last eleven days, and it took all of that one to get the cars in shape to go again. But I shall do as I am doing now as often as possible and write on the road while we are lying up waiting for dark.

It is quiet to-night so I can think consecutively, but it is not often so. Last night we were here and it was even hard to breathe for the air shock of the great batteries across the road. We are pretty close now, but except for five miles of

## THE DAY

open running in plain sight we are under the lee of a hill so it is comfortable enough.

The boys are behaving splendidly when we get in tight places. Last night when the Boche were shrapnel sniping at a *parc*, the bunch sat back and sang "A Perfect Day" and laughed. To-night as they are preparing to go on they are whistling, though they are hollow-eyed with fatigue.

Would there were time to enjoy the season here. Things are reversed and the rains which came so often have ceased. All is the most beautiful Indian summer. But we seldom see those things. The days are hid in clouds of dust and we move too hard and fast for sight-seeing.

*September 17.*

You have heard, perhaps, or read somewhere, of the toast they used to drink in Germany to "the Day" — to the day when Germany should crush England in

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

hate and set herself supreme as mistress of the world.

I may have told you of the toast that always is drunk when Canadians meet us and reach out a hand with a friendly "Hello, Yank!" that warms your heart. Then, and I have never known it to fail, the first glasses are raised to "the Day" when North America is joined together in victory. They are great boys — those "Canucks," the premier fighters of the war and the best friends America has, and they mean it when they say such things.

But there is another toast to another day that I drank not long ago that I shall tell you of. The others were born of hate — but this was drunk to love.

It was a day or so ago up front — I had stepped down into an artillery post to watch the firing, and found a man who spoke English. We talked together for a time and I found that he had lived before

## THE DAY

the war in our town. And because in some things it is easy to go below the surface a bit out here, he told me of the girl he had left back there and showed me a picture of her in a locket on his breast. He almost cried, for it hurts like that at times, and men who are used to the sight of Death break down at the thought of home. But I understood and told him so.

Then he brought a bottle and the glasses from his bomb-proof, and setting them down upon the tail-piece of the gun — the one they called “Alsace” — he poured a toast to “the Day” when he and I should travel back across the sea, when I in one place and the brave Jean Giroult in another in the same great city should be at home. We were each to think of the other and be thankful.

It was rather dramatic the way he did it all, but it is their nature here and I liked him for it. And I shall try to remember in

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

my happiness to think of him, for I shall get home first.

He — poor fellow — has been wounded nine times and twice given up as dead, but he had not given up hope — and indeed why should he? He can't be killed, I guess.

*September 19, 1917.*

To do the thing that's being done I suppose I should write "Somewhere in France" below the date-line, but that seems to be a bit too definite to suit the censors judging from the way my letters are not getting through.<sup>1</sup> At the time of writing this, however, I am in a very definite somewhere and there are indications that it may become "nowhere" rather shortly.

You see, they are working us so hard

<sup>1</sup> The censor must have relented, for eight came through in the mail.

## THE AMMUNITION PARCS

nowadays that the only time we have to write is when they are loading and unloading us in the ammunition *parcs*.

This one we are in now is getting to be a favorite target and the road into it has been completely ploughed up — nice place for five-ton trucks to play around in.

The boys brought back hunks of bursted shell weighing up to eight pounds that missed them by distances of anywhere from forty to four hundred feet — depending on the imagination of the particular driver. But we are shot in both arms with luck — we either come through just too soon or too late to get into trouble, and my particular section has only lost one car and no drivers. Not all the others have been so lucky, but we've fared better than the ambulance sections that were sent to Verdun. Those poor fellows have been literally shot to pieces. Maybe I am a bit premature in my optimism, for they

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

got theirs in the last attack and our attack has n't come off yet.

But it may be that things will have changed before that time. The United States Government is to take over the service very soon for those who are willing to stay. It is rather difficult to know what to do. I should have very decent prospects with the Government if all goes well, having had good experience as a non-com. They now talk of sending all the sergeants to training-school and making commissioned officers of them. I am now a sergeant and have a clean record so far, so that I am in line all right.

Of course there are regrets about staying. When I came over I had hoped that the war would be well toward the end by the time my enlistment was up, and I had planned to go ahead at once with the beginning of my business life. This, of course, will delay that, although the ex-

## THE DRAFT

perience gained may be in many respects equally valuable if I come through all right. And if I don't, of course it won't have mattered, anyhow. But that is a chance we all have to take, and it is n't, after all, the least bit terrifying. This is far from being a slacker job and things have been getting a bit tight lately. *Mais — c'est la guerre* — and the job has to be done by some one — so why not me?

Frankly, we are a bit disappointed here at the way the draft is turning out — the evasions and exemptions are too frequent for a healthy condition of the public mind; but one can't help feeling that it is not yet grasped. Our experience has taught us much over here that will be a long time drifting across the ocean, I suppose.

*September 26, 1917.*

The official bulletins for the week state that all is quiet on this sector. If this is

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

quietude, what has gone before has been coma, and what is coming will be a good square chunk of inferno. We are working harder and harder every day in preparation for an attack and seeing the most excitement we have had since being here. The "Fritzies" have the range of our dépôts and they won't let them alone at all. Yesterday in an eighteen-hour run I saw two ammunition *parcs* go off, making a total loss of several weeks of work in about five minutes' time. Take it from yours truly it was some sight.

The first one was in the daytime when we were creeping along under the lee of a hill and could hear the whizz-bangs and big ones coming in up ahead. They stopped us in a woods about three quarters of a mile from a hand-grenade *parc* and told us to wait patiently for an explosion which might come off in five minutes or in as many hours, but which

## AN EXPLOSION

would surely come, for the place was burning rapidly. The explosion came all right.

Five of us had gone up ahead to watch the fireworks from a hilltop and had just arrived when the place let go. Up to the time we started down the back side of the hill, running had been in its infancy. Some one claimed that two Frenchmen who had been there with us beat us to the trench, but I doubt it. They had wings if they did. I thought that the thing would let go all at once and have it over with, but the explosion lasted nearly a minute and a half in one continuous roar and the air was filled with hot "fat" for nearly three minutes as a result of that law somebody made about all that went up coming down. I collected a few samples that lit in our neighborhood and shall bring them home if I can. But I now have such car-loads of junk that I don't know what to do with it.

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

There is still no new dope about what the Government is going to do with us.

But the work itself is getting better as time goes on. To be sure, we are pretty tired, for we have had no rest in eighteen days and the work is a little more nerve-racking and requires a good deal more physical exertion than it ever has before. Every muscle in me aches, but we all have a sort of satisfied feeling of having accomplished a whole lot and kept a pretty clean road record that repays.

My letters are rather stupid nowadays, but it can't be helped — the attack is coming soon, and after that we shall rest and I can write without having to prop my eyes open.

*September 27.*

There is some of the mud of the Chemin des Dames on this paper, so please consider it of historical interest instead of

## SHELLS IN THE RIVER

thinking I am serving you soiled paper. They are raising a dickens of a racket up here to-night. We are lying alongside the Aisne waiting for the German *saucisses* to go down, and the Huns are dropping a few over just to say good-evening, but they are far enough from us not to bother. Most of the *obus* are landing in the river and making quite beautiful geysers. It seems strange to talk of shells doing anything beautiful, but they are missing the bridge a mile and spouting water fifty feet in the air. So long as they don't elevate the noses of those guns, it is going to be fun to watch them come over. The sun is just going down the hill and if you listen closely and locate the direction you can often see the charges coming.

But to get away from the war — I am to come home. To that end I began burning my bridges to-day, but it was n't turning down my country at all. It may not

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

be the end, for the war will be long and very terrible, and many, many men will yet be called. The time will come when bad eyes and things will make no difference.

That is all only a possibility, — of course nobody knows what will happen, — but we must be prepared. With this experience and my ability to speak French, I ought always to be able to do decently whatever happens.

How tired I am of it all — so heartless and dirty and useless. But we have done a lot of good here — we can't help knowing that. The "good-bye" speech of the old men we relieved when we took the section over was a touching thing that I shall never forget. If it were only that those poor devils had got their chance to go home and be happy again, it would be worth it all, but we've done more than that and done it well, so there are no regrets.

## IN FOR A NASTY NIGHT

Now word has just come to send the cars out three minutes apart. There is shelling and we are in for a nasty night. If we get home at daybreak it will be fifty-two hours since we have had even our poor excuses for a bed or a decent meal.

But there is n't a great deal of risk in the game. Of course, they never bother to shoot at us, and when we get in the way of a little fire it is our orders to save the trucks, so we don't get much.

At first I thought that was rather a cowardly thing to do, but I understand now what the necessity is and that sometimes it takes more courage to run for it than to stick.

*September 29, 1917.*

This is more or less just to show you that they have typewriters in France, but also it is quicker, and speed counts now.

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

We are going like the d——, twelve hours on duty and nine hours off in which we eat, sleep, work on the cars, and be merry when we are not too tired. To-night we are not feeling very gay, for two of the boys were reported killed. They were not of this section, but they were friends of all of us and it is getting pretty close home. We take the north "trick" to-night, but it is our luck not to have anything happen. I have n't been within a quarter of a mile of an arriving shell in two weeks.

I wish I could take a little week-end trip across. It is awfully hard to know what to do about enlisting in the army over here — I want to get home before going on with the game, but may lose opportunities by so doing that will never come again. There is no doubt in my mind but what the war is good for a couple of years more, at least, and that would mean

## THE RECRUITING OFFICERS

that even if I did n't want to stick it out, I should have to, anyhow, in some capacity or other. For bad eyes and flat feet and such are n't going to be counted much longer; too many men are going to be needed for such trifles to matter.

However, there is not much over here now that I can do, for they are still holding to the same restrictions that they had at home.

I've got to run along now — for all night on the road. Don't worry about me, for I always have luck and I manage to skin through somehow.

*September 29, 1917.*

It seems now that all my sleepless nights and worrying about what I was going to do for the rest of the war were wasted. The recruiting officers are here. Within an hour they had made it plain that all of the promises about being able

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

to get in regardless of eyes and such things were in vain. I shall be allowed a special concession to complete the term of my contract as a sort of free-lance and about half of us are in the same boat. I don't know just what our status will be, but if the American army will have us in charge I think I need not worry about that, for they play fair.

I can't help being a little glad that I could n't make the grade. I did not want to a bit, — none of us do, — but we feel that we are needed and realize, perhaps a bit better than those at home, just how necessary it is to "carry on" and to give all one can. I may come home for a while, at least. There may be something later, but I shall not plan further until after I get back — certainly the prospect of getting home is a whole lot in itself. After one has been here long enough, they say that no one plans that far ahead because

## RUNNING BETWEEN SHELLS

it ceases to seem probable; but I have not attained that stage yet, although there have been a few times when it seemed exceedingly doubtful.

I dread the next ten days. There will be a big attack, and much heavy work such as we have been doing lately will become rather warm at times. We continue to be lucky — have been within five minutes of two ammunition *parc* explosions which were caused by incendiary shells from the Boches; escaped from one *parc* that was being shelled by running the cars out every four minutes — four minutes being the interval of fire, we had time to crank and move one car between shots. Two of the boys were hit that trip, but by spent shrapnel that made only slight flesh wounds that did not incapacitate them.

I am pretty tired — some of us have had more or less double duty to do, as a few of the boys have had more than they

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

could handle and had to be put *en repos* for a couple of weeks to rest up. To-day is my second full day of rest in twenty-four days, and it was naturally welcome. I have had ten hours of sleep, the first bath in two weeks, a shirt-hunt for fleas, have patched up the holes the mice chewed in my blankets, had a late breakfast of cold coffee and mouldy bread, and shall spend the next few hours in writing letters. The sort of thing I have just written looks rather odd in print, but really it is n't bad. For a little while my more or less fastidious sense revolted; but I soon got used to it all, and the way I have thrived under conditions certainly indicates that it does n't hurt any one. I have stored up enough good health the last four months to last me the rest of my life.

We sort of live by comparison over here, anyhow. The other fellow is almost

## UNITED STATES ENLISTMENT

always worse off than you are, so you count yourself lucky in any event, and let it go at that.

*October 16, 1917.*

The time is long since past when I should have written you, but there has been no time. Many things have transpired in the last fifteen days (aside from the fact that we are working very hard) of which the most important is that I have joined the army.

This may be rather surprising in view of the fact that I so recently wrote you that they would not take me on account of my eyes. It was only a day after that letter that the officers came again saying that they needed us very much and would we do our part. They arranged for waivers on the eyes and I enlisted as a private in the Quartermaster Corps of the regular army (transport division).

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

I suppose it is just a little different enlisting out here under the shadow of the front. At home one has friends around and at least a chance to say good-byes. Certainly *we* know well enough what we are going into and that makes it harder. It did n't help any either to have been so sure that I was coming home that I had begun to plan for it.

But there is n't any question that there is a duty to stay, so we are determined to take things as they come and smile. My lot is easier than most at that, I suppose.

Winter is here already and is going to be very disagreeable if it stays like it is now — but, once again, “it is the war.” This formative period when things are not altogether smooth is trying, of course, and does n't tend to lighten the temporary feeling that the bottom has dropped out of the scheme of things.

But in the war one does n't really have

## UNITED STATES ENLISTMENT

a right to plan month by month. It has to be year by year or not at all, for years are large enough to take care of most of the hopes we have.

I have not ceased to plan for things after the war is over, though God knows how long that may be. I think I have the right to plan, — I am pretty sure of coming out all right, — especially if I go higher in the game. Then there may be furloughs if the war is long and one of those will be worth a year of ordinary life if that is all.

I am determined to be cheerful about the enlistment and you all must be too. It hurts us all a bit, of course, at first, but I think we shall all come to regard this as a normal abnormality. It may be two years before we are out of this — certainly not longer. I shall have gained a good many things in experience as well as lost a good deal of headway in my start in life. It

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

will be hard after the war, too, for a time, no doubt, but that is necessity and reckoned by world standards is not sacrifice. I regret that my service (motor transport) is not very highly regarded either in civil or military circles — it is one of the despised, inglorious sort, but it is nevertheless a man's-size job and necessary.

My being in this, or anything else, of course, does n't win any battles, so I shall try to get used to being merely a part of a machine, although I hope to be able to remain a thinking part.

Love and courage to you all.

*October 22, 1917.*

Pardon the writing tools, but consider yourself lucky at that. I ran out of ink yesterday and wrote to Ray last night on packing-paper. To-morrow this stub of pencil will be a total loss and I will quit bothering the censor. This is getting to

## BILLETED IN A BARN

be the worst war I ever fought in; but an Irishman I met yesterday said he thought the next four years would be the worst of it, so it is n't so bad — yet.

We are quartered just now in a little 2 x 4 town and billeted in a cow-stable from which everything but twelve oxen, one hundred and twenty sheep, four peacocks, sixteen pheasants, twenty rabbits, and a couple of odd thousand of chickens have been removed. It is the most comfortable place I have seen in the war zone. It is warm and sometimes dry. A sign on the door says there is room for forty men in it, but says nothing about the three thousand assorted fleas and sheep-ticks.

It did n't rain yesterday. I felt uncomfortable without a raincoat and finally could n't stand the long dry spell and took a bath. There's ice on the water-tank every morning now, but I don't mind, for

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

it thaws about noon and there's plenty of time after lunch to wash my face before drill. Drill, by the way, is one of the best things I do so long as I have an acre field to stop them in. Even at that I gave an order yesterday that made the squad hard to catch until I asked 'em to "please stop." They were very obliging about it because they were only about two feet from a five-foot fence.

Father's cigarettes drifted in the other day — also a package of cookies from D. Buchanan. Needless to say both are being muchly enjoyed. I hope some more cigarettes are on the way. D——'s never came. I have given them up as lost.

I have had no letters from the United States except one from father in six weeks now. I'm getting lonesome. Probably before morning I shall be miserable, for (being *en repos* now) I took a twenty-mile journey back to a large town and spent

## IMPROVISED PASSES

the afternoon in a *pâtisserie*. I'm not sure, but I think the bill was four dollars. That does n't matter, though, for after being cooped up in a place like this for four weeks, when you can't buy anything at all, it was worth it.

On the way home I lost our *ordre du mouvement* just about the time when the road was beginning to be thickly populated by military guards. That made it difficult till I remembered my birth certificate and flashed that on the first one. It worked like a charm, for it looked official so long as you could n't read what it was all about. A better stunt would be to carry around a diploma — that has the same effect upon the unsuspecting guard as forty yards of gold braid when one is riding in a staff car. In the care-free days before I enlisted in the army I was one of a party of five that penetrated fifteen miles through guarded roads, clad in pa-

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

jamias and fur-lined coats, on a wild search for some drinkable beer and armed only with a pass to a New York movie show. "Pass" is the same word in French as in English, so that part was easy, but the beer was a dismal failure. It always is over here.

Some day I'm going to write a yarn about all the fool stunts I've done when we are *en repos* for a day or so. I can't seem to get in the mood for writing now, but perhaps I shall again later. I suppose this little mood I'm in now will wear off in a month or so. Maybe it is homesickness — I don't know. Perhaps it is just disappointment. I find I had counted a good deal on coming home before enlisting, having kidded myself into thinking I had a right to. Now, unless I get a not-looked-for furlough, two years is the least I count on being here. Two years seems a long time looking forward, and the memories

## AMERICAN ENLISTMENT

of all the things I had planned to do in them smart a little even as I realize how little I am losing compared with what it is to a lot of fellows.

This is a rotten letter, I know. Excuse me. We go back to work to-morrow, so I shan't have time to write for a while. Be good — don't worry — I'm all right.

*October 26, 1917.*

Lest the letter which I wrote to you a week or more ago may not have reached you, I must say again the things I wrote in it. Briefly it told you that the recruiting officers had obtained a waiver for me on my eyes and that I had enlisted in the transport service of the regular army for the duration of the war. It was a bit hard in some ways, of course, for I had counted on seeing you again first, but now that the first pangs are less poignant I am mighty glad of it.

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

It is good to have American food and clothing again and officers who speak your own language and understand your ways. One feels a little better to be under one's own flag — something that means a lot more than you think until you've tried another.

So I am as content as one can be in this sort of life — the homesicknesses and memories and all the reasons that made me want to come home can be kept down most of the time, and we shall learn to keep on smiling after a while (I am afraid we shall have plenty of time in which to learn).

I had a letter from you to-day that must have been either very much rained on or dropped in the river. It was pretty much blurred, so perhaps I did n't get all it said, but you know now that all the other packages except the cigarettes

## GETTING PACKAGES

have come to me. Now I may tell you that the sweater is here.

I wish you could know what the joy of getting packages is, the expectation before they are opened — the search for the little notes. Those little incidents are big incidents that change the complexion of whole weeks.

You ask me what to send. You seem to know pretty well. I was rather surprised to find they called the knitted things luxuries, for we really need them very much. Out here we all call the sweaters and mufflers “knit-by-loving-hands things,” and we mean more than a jest by it.

But aside from those things which we are supplied with and the things you have already sent, I think what we most crave are sweets and books. After the 1st we will no longer be able to buy even the wee little cakes that we used to buy (at \$2.50 a pound) nor the candies which we some-

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

times got up courage to buy at the rate of \$4 a pound.

As for books — of course there are some here, but not the kind I like best. I've been hungry for a little touch of poetry, too, and one can buy nothing except British things even in Paris.

So when sometimes you feel inclined to send something, may it be one of these, please?

*November 20.*

Just a line in haste to tell you what I am doing. This will come to you by the kindness of the last of the boys to start home. There are also some little packages for Christmas. I hope the packages can be got through all right.

We have just come through the attack of Malmaison — you will have read about it if you follow the war news. It was, indeed, a glorious victory for our forces and

## IN THE PATH OF THINGS

one fortunately which did not cost us much in blood.

We of the transport service continue much in the same work as before and remain in the same sector, although closer up. During the counter-attack our camp was right in the path of things and we had to spend some unpleasant nights in half-flooded dugouts thirty feet underground. Now, however, things are fine and we have moved out of the cow-stable into nice clean barracks which will be our winter quarters.

There will not be much driving now, so that we shall not suffer very much from the cold which is here. There has been snow and a good deal of ice. The muffler has helped a great deal to keep me warm. I took it out yesterday and (much as I hated to) got it all wet, and it neither shrank nor rusted, so I know it is all right, for everything but the very best does one or the other in this climate.

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

Only fifteen minutes till train-time —  
I must hurry.

Au revoir.

Your package full of good things came yesterday morning just as we were starting out on convoy, and since I had no time to open it I took it with me. I was glad, too, for we were out a long time and it was cold. I made hot tea with one of the little tablets dropped into my canteen and heated it on the exhaust pipe and ate cookies and chocolate with it.

It was a very pleasant surprise, for I had n't expected anything. Until one has been a long time without sweets, — even sugar in the coffee — one does n't realize how much those things mean in satisfying the appetite.

No one seems to know just what is to be done with us. They've needed us and we've been so busy here that there has

## AMERICAN TRUCK-DRIVERS

been no time for changes. The Allies don't seem to be making a secret of the fact that Fritzie may make himself rather a handful soon, and whatever our *army* may do, if we stay here, we'll be in it plenty.

Lately there have been many long and difficult trips and we have been so short-handed that where the French sections we are with have two drivers to the car and extra reliefs, we have had only one driver and no reliefs. It is a good thing we are young, for older eyes and "tired" bodies could n't stand the strain of continual days and nights. As it is we have weird fancies and "see things" a lot, but get through somehow.

May we brag just a bit to say we only wrecked one car and smashed three on the last trip, while the Frenchmen dropped them over cliffs, tore down bridges, hung them in trees, and turned

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

them over and burned them all along a hundred and fifty miles of road? Don't blame the Frenchmen, though, — three years of it have worn their nerve and stolen their "night eyes." Try turning off your lights some night when you are driving in the country through rain or fog — try just a minute of it and compute the nervous strain of six hours of that through traffic.

But mostly it is only the long hours and mental and physical strain — exposure and fatigue — that we have to fear. Our cars are so big and heavy that steam rollers and the "tanks" are the only things we need be afraid of in collision, while in "spills" the car takes the shock and we are only badly shaken and have a sore "tummy" where the retaining straps catch us. Fire is very terrifying, but seldom comes and we know well how to fight it.

## THE WORST YET

Also this is n't one of the terrible tales I will be telling thirty years from now. I believe I shan't want to be the kind of a "vetrun" who sits around and "recollecks" and gives flags to school children!

Now — I've enjoyed being a little foolish to-night, sitting up in bed smoking "les cigarettes Américaines" and nibbling dainties you sent me, and I'm feeling ever so much better, with the grippe most gone.

*November 26.*

It is rather laughable — on the very evening when I wrote you that we were dug in for the winter and that the work would not be bad at all, they ordered us out and we've been on the road five days and nights, stopping only now and then to fill the cars with gas and oil. It has been rather terrible — the worst we've ever had. I drove alone, and for the first

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

two days and nights I never left the wheel. There was no food, for the supply-train was hopelessly wrecked, and I went all that time on half a can of salmon and some hard-tack and chocolate.

You don't have any idea what that means, do you? Forty-eight hours with your fingers cramped around a steering-wheel — rain beating in your face and stinging your eyes till they cried and stung and stuck half shut — straining to see in the dark — fighting the wheel and fighting sleep, knowing that if the latter got you the other would too — passing the wrecks of carloads of troops that had toppled over and wounded their charges — fighting that which we most dread, the fire underneath in the brake-bands that creeps toward the gas-tanks before you know it's there.

There will be more of that to-morrow — we are far to the north on the desolate

## SEEING THINGS

plains of Flanders, helping the English in their splendid push on Cambrai. To-day we rest, and God knows we need it. I slept eight hours last night lying in the mud under my car which was too fully loaded to climb into. There is oil and mud on my face and in my hair — I have not shaved for a week — my clothing is torn and burned and water-soaked — and I'm cold to the bone.

Really I thought in a half-delirious sort of way that I was going to die or go mad like Clarke and have to be choked unconscious. He, poor chap, after ditching his car four times and having it catch on fire once, went completely. Practically all of us were "seeing things." I can laugh at it now, but not so then. You see, the salmon had been open much too long. I knew it, but was starved; so the ptomaine caught me at the wheel. I remember laughing crazily a long time as I drove.

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

Once I "shyed" at something on the road and crashed through a fence, but came to in time to keep from going over.

It is n't very much fun — pretty cold — raining and snowing by turns — and these forced marches without sleep, but it won't last long, and if it will mean that they are going to drive all winter I'd go through anything. If they only can and will do it the summer will see the end, I'm sure. These last two pushes we've been . . .<sup>1</sup>

*November 27.*

Two letters from you came to-day — one containing pictures of David and one containing news of things at home that I was equally glad to have. I shall try to answer them adequately, but I'm afraid I am a bit stupid and tired still.

We have just come back from a seven-

<sup>1</sup> Censored.

## THE HORROR OF BATTLES

day convoy that contained more of the vicissitudes of war than anything else we've ever done. However, it is all over now, and our travels along the front have made me more optimistic than I have dared to be in some time.

I am afraid I've been pretty homesick lately. The letters that come from you at home are so full of plans for a Christmas that is n't going to be, and you seem to be counting on my coming so much, that it hurts.

It may be a long time — we may all get very tired of waiting till this is over. One can't help the selfish wish that it was some one else that had the job to do. But certainly we don't wish it had been our father's generation nor that it should be the generation of our children.

I've been seeing a good deal more of the real horror of battles lately. Our sections have worked in two attacks during the

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

fall and I've seen the awful wake that lay behind the advance. Of course, we are dreadfully sick and tired of it all. We seem to live on hopes and speculations as to when it will be over and we can come home again.

Really it is n't always as bad as that — melancholia seldom visits us. Mostly — on the surface at least — we are just slightly sobered college boys. There is never any lack of spirit for the day's work and we manage to squeeze a laugh out of almost any circumstance. The old friends are mostly gone now, but the new men — the regulars — are much the same. It does n't matter much whether your accent is Harvard or Hoboken — whether you were a football star or chewed Star Plug — out here on the job. If you're a man — a willing worker, and not too d——d incapable — you'll do to push a "cammie."

Ten minutes to "taps." I shall have to

## BIRTHDAY PLANS

halt this. Forgot to say that a box of Hershey's came in fine condition from mother. I have n't sampled it yet — saving it till Friday, which is my birthday.

I think I will have a party. That will probably break me till pay-day, but until the first of the year I'm not going to save my pennies. There are too many things I either want or need (or both) by way of winter equipment. I expect to be comfortable if it is possible.

*November 29.*

If I had n't already enlisted before your two letters about my staying came, I am afraid I should have been a bit confused. Neither of them made allowance for conditions here, but of course you could n't know that. I did the only thing there was for me to do — not because I was afraid of the voyage home (for I think you overestimate the danger there), but because

## TRUCKING TO THE TRENCHES

it seemed up to me to do it. I have enlisted as a private. It means hard, tiresome, dirty work compared with peace standards, but compared to other services it is n't too bad. I don't expect to stay a private, however, — at least I can be a non-com. and that will lessen up the manual labor which is often a little more than I can stand up under. I have already taken examination for a sergeant's warrant — passed thirteenth out of the outfit and shall get it sooner or later.

We don't know just what we are going to be put at or where we are going. I probably can't tell you when I do know. If we stay here the winter will be pretty tough or pretty comfortable, depending on how much we roll. The quarters here are good, but the roads and the weather abominable. Compared with home temperatures it is n't so very cold — just about freezing, but that goes pretty hard

## THANKSGIVING DAY

when you eat, sleep, and live in it for seven days and nights.

Don't worry about me, though.

To-day, by the way, is Thanksgiving. We are told that we *may* have Turkey in a few days. I doubt it.

Love to you all and a Merry Christmas.

THE END

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