

Sampigny, France (Near St. Mihiel)
July 31, 1919.

Dear Folks:-

Things are happening so fast for me that I can hardly keep track of them. We finished our tour of the S. O. S. at Is-sur-Tille on the 25th. The main bakery of the army is there, but I was unable to locate William Hayatian. The next day we struck the battle line for the 1st time at Chateau-Thierry. This was my 1st sight of a ruined town, altho this place was not badly damaged. We saw the place where the Marines of the 2nd Div. stopped the advance of the Germans over the Marne. The Marne is very small (about 75 ft. wide) to be such an historic stream. We went by train thru Epernay and Reims to Soissons. Here we took our trucks and went to the battlefield just south of Soissons where the 1st and 2nd Divs. with the French Maroccan Div. made a drive eastward that forced the evacuation by the Germans of the whole Chateau-Thierry salient. Here we saw an American cemetery. The villages in the vicinity and also Soissons are all knocked to pieces. We walked about 10 miles in the path of the 1st Div. On every battlefield we find camps of German prisoners engaged in clearing up the barbed wire and filling in the trenches. They are very slightly guarded, but make no attempt to escape for they are well treated. We continued south from Soissons to Vaux, to Belleau, then to Belleau Wood. That was a tough nut for the 2nd Div. to crack and it is no wonder they failed, until the artillery had cleared the place up. The machine gun nests are extremely cleverly concealed in the woods. But the shell holes are so close together it is remarkable anything could live in the place. The town of Belleau is the worst ruin I ever saw. We returned to Soissons for the night. I forgot to mention the American cemetery at Belleau Wood that shows the fierceness of the fighting. In the morning we embussed again and started toward Reims thru Fismes, a town which changed hands several times. Every bridge over the Aisne in the vicinity has been destroyed at least once, and every village is a heap of ruins. We passed thru the famous Chemin des Dames, a 4 year battle field. This is a real No Man's Land for miles and miles. The earth is churned up by thousands of shell holes and trenches. But the strange thing about it is the carpet of blood-red poppies that covers every square inch. It is really uncanny. In the heart of the Chemin des Dames was Ft. Mal-Maison, a part of the German line for years. This was an old fort built by Louis XIV but recently rebuilt. The walls had been knocked to powder and the old underground passages exposed. It is impossible to believe that anyone could have lived thru such a bombardment. Finally we arrived at the base of the cathedral at Reims. All the windows and art treasures had been removed to Paris, but the building was still wonderful in it's ruin. The Germans failed to damage it irreparably but it will be many years before it can be repaired. The statue of Joan of Arc had also been removed. At Reims we met another group of West Pointers of the classes of '20, '19, '18, '17 and '16 making the same kind of a tour we are making. That night the trains took us to Paris, stopping at Pantin in the suburbs. Our trucks took us thru Paris by the Arc d'Triumphe and the Hotel des Invalides to the General Headquarters of the A. E. F. Passing thru a dingy looking building we came thru a court yard to a building very luxuriously fitted up, and passing thru this we came out onto a wonderfully beautiful lawn surrounded by gardens, trees, grottes, etc. Gen. Pershing then came out and addressed us for half an hour, telling us of the remarkable opportunity we were having and giving us advice as to our future conduct as officers. Then he shook hands with each of us in turn and we went out. We went thru the Pantheon de la Guerre next. This is a tremendous painting, a tribute of French artists to their army and their allies. It is in a specially constructed building. The canvas is in a cylindrical form so that the spectators can walk around the platform. The painting shows 5,000 heroes of France reviewing the French troops of all kinds. Each of the allies is represented in some way. The United States group contains a West Point cadet in full dress uniform. The remarkable part of the whole thing is

that each man is painted from his portrait, making thousands of portraits. The perspective is so wonderful that one can't believe it is a painting, but would swear that at least some of the objects were real. The Y. M. C. A. furnished us with guides for the various things we saw. We went through the Hotel des Invalides and Napoleon's Tomb. In the afternoon we went to L'Ecole Polytechnique. We were admitted with all due ceremony into the court yard where the cadets, all veterans of several years of war with ranks of anywhere from sous-lieutenant to chef d'battalion were formed. The commandant of the school, Gen. Curmer, with our leader, Col. Cromer, then reviewed both battalions. The Gen. awarded several medals of Honor to heroes of the school. When we were dismissed the two schools mixed together and fraternized. It was hard to carry on conversation with them, but they knew more English than we did French. We formed in line hand in hand and rushed all thru the school, according to their custom. They showed us how they hazed a newcomer and in general we mixed together very closely. Later the commandant gave us refreshments including much champagne. Finally after much speech-making and cheering we broke up. We were free that night in Paris. I went to the Folies-Bergeres, but as I couldn't understand a word I didn't get much out of it. It was a good deal of fun for us to go into a French restaurant and try to order a meal. We seldom got what we expected to eat.

The next day we all went to Versailles in trucks. A Y. man showed us thru the palace, including the famous Gallery of Mirrors where the Peace Treaty was signed a few days ago. It is the most luxurious building I ever hope to see. No wonder the French people objected to paying for it. The military School of St. Cyr close by was our next stop. They gave us a more formal reception than L'Ecole Polytechnique, but still treated us well. This school at St. Cyr is the infantry, cavalry and aviation school, while the other school gives instruction in artillery and engineering. At St. Cyr they showed us a splendid exhibition of cavalry drill and stunts. They considered it a great day when the graduating classes of both schools met at St. Cyr, and treated us accordingly. The cadets at St. Cyr are also officers sent back for a post-war course. When we were given our freedom late in the afternoon, I went up on the Eifel Tower. It certainly gives one a splendid view of the city. After a little shopping and a fine French dinner, we went to the train. Our stay in Paris was over.

We received 1,050 francs as our July pay while in the city. You see we get 10% increase in pay for overseas duty. Also we get 4 cents a mile for each mile we travel on this trip. So we ought to make something out of this trip. I have now 2,180 francs with me. Doesn't that sound like a lot? But it takes 7 francs to make a dollar at present rates.

From Paris we came overnight by train to this place, Sampigny, which is just south of the point of the old St. Mihiel salient, which the Americans wiped out last September. This battle was admirably planned and for some reason everything went thru just as planned, as very few battles do. We went by truck thru St. Mihiel, Apremont, Seichepray, Xivray, in fact along the line which the Germans held from 1914 till the Americans jumped off last September. They were there so long that they honeycombed the hillsides with dugouts, some of which are quite pretentious affairs. On top of Montsec they constructed the most ingenious observation station I ever expect to see. It is a maze of underground passages and dugouts. Every village in the salient is a heap of ruins occupied principally by German prisoners, who are clearing up the battlefields. It is one big maze of barb wire. It was at Seichepray that the Americans, the 26th Division, when they were first put into action suffered such a reverse. The Germans put over a raid there with a few hundred shock troops, captured the town with 200 Americans, then returned to their lines. What effect this had on Gen. Cole, Col. Logan and others, I do not know.

The general impression here is that the 26th was a very fine division but had inefficient officers. I have seen several battlefields where Joe Warga's division, the 42nd, fought. At Thiaccourt is the largest American cemetery, where Hobey Baker and Raoul Lufberry are buried.

I have just had a swim in the Meuse. It's just like ice water but it feels fine just the same.

Tomorrow we go to Verdun, then to the scene of the battle of the Meuse-Argonne, which is considered the greatest battle of the war in point of number of men engaged. Here we spend 4 days. Then our tour thru Belgium and Germany till we leave Coblenz on the 20th of August. According to the latest rumor we go directly back to the U. S. after that, so that we should get back about the 1st of September. But we may have to stay a while longer. I would like to go to England for a few days if possible.

Well I guess I have brought this up to date. I only wish I could talk things over with you instead of writing. I received your first letter in Paris and you may be sure it was welcome. Hoping you are all well.

With love,

Maurice.

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