

A.E.F., France
July 30, 1918

So much as happened since the last time I wrote, that I hardly know where to begin or where I left off last letter. I'm sent a cable to you and mom of this morning, to let you know that I am well and in good working order, and now I will try to give you a few more of the details.

When we left the front up near Montdidier, we expected to go for a rest, as we had been on the front so long. We went back towards Paris, and got so close we could see the Eiffel Tower and all the tall buildings. It was very hard marching, as we moved at night and for three nights in succession, we marched 40 km per night, and then groomed and cleaned up all morning, getting three or four hours sleep in the p.m. and away again at night. I got so I could ride or walk in my sleep with perfect accuracy and assurance.

Then, we were suddenly put into trucks, leaving the horses to follow behind us as fast as they could, and shot up to the big counter attack of the 18th of this month. We were on the left of the ¹salient near ²Soissons, and fought along with some of the best troops France has – the Foreign Legion, the Moroccans, and the 20th Corps. You know all about the scrap from the papers. It was a wonderful experience but not particularly jolly.

The artillery followed the attack right up, and two hours after the first wave, we advance for 5 km into what had been German territory. It wasn't jolly as I said, because both sides have good scrappers, and they scrapped! The first place we were er took up our advance position, was in a reserve German trench. They must've been preparing for breakfast, because they left us some good food and cigars, etc.

I went up just ahead of the batteries, with the ³real cart, riding one of the off-horses. It was really good fun to use the old thing, as I had come to regard it as out of date in this war, and only good for really open warfare. The afternoon of the first day, I ran all line up to a little village about a kilometer from the mixed up line, for the Col. (Crane) to adjust the barrage. We ran the line and the Col. couldn't see it from there, so we left it and went up to the next town, a kilometer further on. He insisted on walking out behind the wall, and peeking around the corner at the lines, which were only two or three hundred yards away, to see what was there, and I tagged along behind. We hadn't been there a minute, when a shell plunked in 30 yards away from some gun that was sniping. Three more came and still nearer, at which I tried to show the Colonel that those shells had more than a humorous side, as it was only the sheerest luck that any of them didn't hit us. Finally, he started walking back towards the road. Just as we got to the edge, the road being sunken, about five feet, we heard another coming, and both jumped. I jumped a little quicker, and got down all right, but the Col. got a piece of shell right under his right shoulder blade, which went in quite deep.

Another soldier about and I got in a cellar and dressed him up, and then I had the darnedest time getting him evacuated. Everything was so mixed up and nobody seemed able to get a stretcher, and of course no ambulance was up. It took over three

hours to get him out, and then the French took him, as he was a colonel. It was a pretty warm three hours too, as some German planes were over us most of the time, regulating the artillery fire and doing business themselves. One of them slung a bomb some 20 yards from the shell hole I was in, and then circled around with the engine cut off popping away with machine gun down in our general direction. It was a very odd sensation to be back, and watch the son-of-a-guns popping away, and wondered just exactly which way they were pointing. Anyhow, I finally got him out, and I have since heard that he was operated on and doing well.

Almost the worst of it all was the poor supply of food and water during the advance. For the first three days, hardly any food came up to us, and even less water. It was hot dry weather, and everybody was terribly thirsty. In consequence, we all drank any darn thing in the water line we could get. As some of it came from the towns just left by Germans the wells might well have been full of all kinds of bugs and poisons, etc., but I guess their exit was too much unpremeditated. Anyhow, I hate to think of some of the stuff I drank.

We lived in just little trenches or sunken places with a 4shelter-half over us. By the way, a shelter-half makes a fine protection; we had one shell fragment bounce on our shelter-half and off on the ground, without coming through. It was spent, and came over on a slope almost parallel to the slope of the tent. Then we moved on to more advanced positions ...XXX... was so that the longer-range German guns ...XXX.... really deserve the credit, are the infantry. They certainly are splendid, and they are the ones who really suffered. Often when liaison between the infantry and artillery was broken, they would go right ahead without artillery. We were up there about six days, the last day being in support of the "Jocks", and now we are jolly well out of it.

Another thing I got to have a healthy respect for, is night bombing by airplane. Thrice, I got caught in a column when the planes came very close and dropped bombs even closer. They can see a column on the road at night pretty easily if it is at all clear, especially when they dropped their darn lights on parachutes. Everybody stands still and hunches that they won't be seen. The planes come down awfully close at night, and chuck bombs and use their machine guns.

It was a bum business, but we are back just outside where I saw Mr. Davidson, and nobody knows where we go from here. I am on a 24-hour leave, and ...XXX... and changed my clothes, and bought my fourth Sam Brown belt, and feel like unto the king. In some few minutes, I get into a bed and just try and imagine how I will sleep. I have received a letter from Frank mailed over here, and saw Uncle Emmons on the way to this place. Also, saw Alerich Mann who took paymaster exams with Frank, and whom I think you saw in Washington. Saw him today on leave from the Yale Mobile Ambulance & Hospital unit.

JCN Notes

¹**Salient** (territory), a battlefield feature that projects into enemy territory.

²**The Battle of Soissons**

The Battle of Soissons (also known as the Battle of the Soissonnais and of the Ourcq (French: Bataille du Soissonnais et de L'Ourcq)* was a World War I battle, waged from 18–22 July 1918, between the French (with American assistance) and German armies.

*Le Soissonnais is the area surrounding the city of Soissons. The Ourcq is a river about 30 miles (48 km) to the south.

Ferdinand Foch, the Allied Supreme Commander, launched the offensive on 18 July; 24 French divisions and 2 U.S. divisions under French command, supported by approximately 478 tanks, sought to eliminate the salient that was aimed at Paris.

The Allies suffered 107,000 casualties (95,000 French and 12,000 American), while the Germans suffered 168,000 casualties.[1]

The battle ended with the French recapturing most of the ground lost to the German Spring Offensive in May 1918.

³**Real Cart**

http://www.warbard.ca/2013/02/15/4ground-cart-review/4ground_cart03/

⁴**Shelter-half**

A shelter-half (UK, Australia, and United States); also known in American English as a pup-tent, dating from before the Second World War.