

# Diary of Jacob Lewis Bower

## World War I



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JACOB LEWIS BOWER

DIARY OF MY ENLISTED LIFE

From July 27, 1917 to February 8, 1919

July 27, 1917

- Enlisted at Recruiting Office in Hagerstown, Md., and from there was sent to Baltimore, at which place I arrived at 8 P.M. Was given a supper ticket by Recruiting Officer. This was my first meal from Uncle Sam.

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- About 9 P.M. I was again re-examined, and passed O.K. and was recommended for the Medical Corp, but through some typographical error, my name got confused with some of the other boys, and I was wrote up for the Infantry, which I have been thankful for ever since. At 11 P.M. we entrained for Columbus, Ohio.

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July 28, 1917

- Arrived in Columbus about 10 P.M. This was my first step in soldiering. Here we were measured for shoes and clothing, and then sent to take a bath, after which we went to bed, which I found was the regular army bunk.

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July 29, 1917

- Was awakened this morning by reveille gun, the first cannon that I ever heard fired. Today being Sunday I thought we would have a rest, as I was very tired from traveling on the train, but there was no rest because we were making up a mighty army and no time could be lost.

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## World War I

July 30, 1917

- Received my first uniform and got another examination, and again passed O.K. Was then sworn into military service. Was transferred to a large barracks where hundreds of other boys were stationed. Here our only duty was to march to mess three times a day. We have very good eats here. Rested up today and now feel fine.

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July 31, 1917

- Got up at 6 A.M. and stood for reveille for the first time. After breakfast policed up around quarters and at 8 A.M took physical drill and was taught foot movement.

August 1, 1917

- Left Columbus about noon for Gettysburg, PA, the camp where the Regular Army was stationed. Had a very nice trip East but very hot.

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- August 3, 1917
- Arrived in Gettysburg about 11 A. M. Hiked about a mile from station to camp. It was very hot and we thought the Sergeant walked us too fast. When we arrived at the camp we were all wet with perspiration and our bodies covered with heat. Stood in line before Regimental Headquarters for roll call. We were then assigned to Company A. 59th Infantry

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- We drew the rest of our equipment and were placed in tents. The first thing we did was take off our coats and oh my what a relief
- August 4 to Sept 5, 1917
- I certainly am glad I was sent to Gettysburg, as it is close to home and expect to go down in about two weeks and stay from Saturday evening until Sunday afternoon. We started drilling today, and are now settled down to regular army life

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- At first the training and exercise was very hard on us as it made all the muscles in our body ache, but we soon got used to it and did not mind it after awhile
- September 6, 1917
- Was made First Class Private today. It is not much, but it means \$3.00 more per month, and then it leads up

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- September 7 to November 4, 1917
- Regular army life, - reveille, mess, drills and hikes. Getting very cold up here.
- November 5 to November 25, 1917
- The Regiment entrained at 4 P.M. for Camp Greene, N.C. When we arrived at our new camp found it a little warmer

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- We found nothing but the kitchens in readiness for us, but we soon got to work and pitched our tents, and in a few days everything was working lovely again. We started to drill now harder than ever before. Here we found lots of mud, the worst I think I ever saw. Our camp is just about three miles from Charlotte, and we spend lots of our spare time there at the different places of amusement

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- November 25, 1917
- I was today transferred to Company D 10th Machine Gun Battalion, which I do not like very well, but still have to do the drilling. This is a new organization, and we are still rationed with the 59th Infantry
- December 5, 1917
- Was taken sick, sent to hospital and operated on for hernia. Got back to Company again about January 10

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- January 10, 1918 to February 25 1918
- Back drilling again. Taking up Machine Gun drill now. Like it. Also some trench work and practice in grenade throwing. Captain Waltz moved us to another camp
- February 26, 1918
- Received my commission today of Corporal

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- March 1, 1918
- Company letter changed from D to A
- March 29, 1918
- Received a ten day furlough and expect to spend Easter at home. This being the last time before going over

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- April 12, 1918
- The whole 4th Division entrained and moved to Camp Mills, Long Island. We had a very pleasant trip North, as we traveled in Pullman coaches, and the people at all the towns along the line gave us a great send off as we passed through. Red Cross Canteen Workers served us with hot coffee and sandwiches at many places along the line. We were allowed to visit New York City quite a few times, as all we had to do in camp was guard duty and inspection two or three times a day

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- May 6, 1918

The whole Division entrained again at 8 A.M. and by 3 P.M. we were all loaded on tug boats. We then went down the river and it seemed as if we passed all around the City. Here we were loaded on the S.S. Rochamboursux which laid in New York Harbor over night and sailed early next morning - May 7, - for France

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- May 7, to 17, 1918
- Had a nice voyage over, no storms and did not get sea sick. There was over 12,000 on board this transport - 1 aerial squadron, a number of Canadian soldiers, Red Cross, Y.M.C.A., and Salvation Army workers, Newspaper men, a lot of passengers and our Division

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- We traveled all alone until the last day out at sea when a convoy joined us early in the morning. Landed in Bordeaux, France harbor 11 A.M., May 17 - just 10 days out at sea. Scenery up the river to Bordeaux is beautiful.

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- May 18, 1918
- Immediately after we had all embarked we were taken on a five mile hike to a Rest Camp. We needed rest after the hike as it was very hot and we had not had any exercise for ten days. Here we had a good bath, the first since we left the U.S., and afterwards a fine supper compared to the boat rations the French had given us for the past ten days. We remained here and rested for three days

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- May 20, 1918

We entrained again today on the “Up to Date” third class French coaches, consisting of six compartment, eight men to each compartment. We had board seats to sit on, which were very hard and uncomfortable especially when you had to sit up for two or three nights in succession and sleep

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- May 21, 1918
- Arrive at Le Mans about 2 P.M. and laid over here until 3 A.M. Here we all lay down on the station platform and took a good nap

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- May 22, 1918
- Arrived at La Have. Here we were quartered in English barracks. Received the Tommie's rations and believe me they are some light. We had light breakfast, not much for dinner, and for TEA - which we call supper - a slice of bread, a little butter, and a cup of tea. Only hope we get a little more to eat tomorrow. Here we turned in our surplus equipment, took a good steam bath, and put on a change of underwear

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- May 24, 1918
- Took a mountain climb today. Passed a German prison camp. Drew English gas masks and received instructions from the Tommy's as to how to use them
- May 25, 1918
- Left La Have on second class French coaches. These have cushions on the seats, but very tiresome as we had to again sit up and sleep

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- May 26, 1918
- Arrived at Ronen 7 A.M. Marched to camp, took a good wash, and had a little more English “Tea”. Here we saw our first Australian troops. They are certainly a fine bunch of men and very good fighters I am told. Left Ronen at 4 P.M. Had a fine trip North and arrived in Calais 2 P.M., May 27

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- May 27, 1918
- Hiked to a rest camp and were quartered in tents embanked with sand bags for protection against bombs. This town is a French seaport, and is visited frequently by enemy bombing planes on account of so many troops landing here. We today had the pleasure of meeting our first enemy airplane, and our anti-aircraft guns shoot at it

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- It came over for the purpose of taking pictures of the town by daylight and then come back at night with bombs and drop them. Had a talk with some Tommies who had just come off the lines, and they certainly have some stories to tell about Fritz and the war

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- May 28, 1918
- Left -Calaie in box cars. Thirty men to a car. Quite a difference to the good old U.S. Pullman coaches. Arrived at Somme at 4 P.M. An English military band came to welcome us, and led us to a rest camp about a mile from the station. We then drew our rations, had supper, after which we had a chat with some Chinamen who were to accompany us as labors from the English government

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- May 29, 1918
- Had an early breakfast and hiked seven miles to France. The country around here is very hilly and it was very hard on us, but I must say that France has very good roads if nothing else. They are at least 100 years behind the U.S. in farming, and many other things. The French farmers take up a large section of land and put up a small village in the center of it, and then allot a small portion to each tenant family

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- The buildings are all made of stone and covered with mud, which makes them look white, as the soil in all parts of this country has a whitish cast. You have to give these people credit for the fine mason work you see everywhere you go
- The way they build and lay out their house is very queer. They put a square place for a large manure pile in the center and then build a large building all around it

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- One part is the house, generally three or four rooms, and usually right next to the kitchen is the cow stable, and on farther is a place for the other animals and crops. The front door never opens toward the road, but always toward the manure pile. No sanitation at all. They have fine horses for work horses and good cows. Everyone works on the farm. The women do most all the work now as all the men are away fighting

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- This being about their harvest time is the busiest time of the year. There is scarcely no corn at all raised, but mostly all wheat, sugar beets, and cow beets. Here we were quartered in a barn and all got full of chicken lice. The boys say that even the Vin Blanc is rotten, and their language seems worse yet

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- Don't believe they understand it themselves. A few days after we landed here we had our first experience of being in a bombing raid. The large bombs make a terrible noise and we all made a line for the nearest cave. Jerry was bombing Etaples and nearby town. At Etaples there was a big railroad bridge they were trying to destroy

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- This being on the main line and the only direct route from the South to Paris, they almost got the bridge, tore a small part of the one corner off of it. There was also a large English hospital here and in one of the raids they made a direct hit and killed a number of nurses and patients

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- May 30, 1918
- Cleaned up our clothing and took a bath.
- May 31, 1918
- Mustered and signed the pay roll the first time in France

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- June 1, 1918
- Crew our motor transports which turned out to be a bunch of English MULES. Our machine gun equipment was the Vicar M.G., and we had few weeks instructions by the Tommy's who are very good instructors in machine gun work

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- June 4, 1918
- The Battalion moved to Newvilly. Here all the 4th Division was camped along the river bank in pup tents for five days. Took a bath cleaned up and had a little machine gun drill
- June 10, 1918
- Moved to Beamanville. Loaded stock and all equipment on train and moved on to La Ferte. Unloaded here June 12

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- June 12, 1918
- Hiked up the Marne river about five miles for a change. Here we had lots of drill work, hikes, and big time learning the French soldiers ways of doing things. Also had quite a few baths in the Marne. It was just like ice water, but it was healthy and made us feel good

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- June 19, 1918
- Today is some big day, and everyone is happy, as we turned in our mules to 58th M.G. Bn., and drew eighteen Fords and six Dodge cars. Also drew two months pay in Francs. Everybody had been broke long before this, and the boys had the town dry long before night as there was not a very large stock on hand

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- June 26, 1918
- Jerry tried to drop a few bombs on us again, but failed. We are only a few miles from the battle front and can see the flash of the big guns and hear the firing.
- June 27, 1918
- Drew eighteen motor cycles at Lizy, and Hotchkiss machine guns. I was today sent to a Machine Gun school for instructions in handling the gun. Was here in school for about a week

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- July 4, 1918
- Went back to Lizy and had a parade made up of the different organizations at the school. The French joined in and marched with us. In the afternoon had a game of baseball and other athletic games

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- July 7, 1918
- The battalion moved to Ocquare. Here received a lot more instructions in the work we were to do on the lines
- July 17, 1918
- Chateau Thierry Drive. Just two months in France. Received orders to move up at 9 P.M. to look Fritz over for the first time. This was the worst night I ever spent in my life

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- It was raining, thundering and lightning and we were all cold and wet to the hide. A number of our cars run into each other, smashed up a few, and put out of commission, including my ammunition car. Loaded the rest of men on the old Ford, which was eight by now, some load, but we got to the town of Brumetz at 6 A.M. all O.K. We only traveled 12 kilometers from Ocquere - very slow traveling

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- The French and American army was all on the move to give Fritz a big surprise. All the roads were blocked at lots of places
- July 18, 1918
- Pulled up beside the French heavy artillery battery to see them send Jerry a morning salute. This is the first time we heard a cannon close and a lot of us thought we were in a barrage. Here we saw our first wounded man

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- He was hurt somehow by the recoil of the gun. The 8th Brigade made a drive of eight kilometers this A.M., and they got tore up very badly. Had a great number gassed and wounded, but the Yanks won a great victory up here and certainly have Jerry on the run. He has started to move home and we are going to keep him going

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- We moved on next morning and I saw one of my friends from the 59th wounded. A steady stream of wounded by now had started back to First Aid Station. The fields are strewn with all kinds of rifles, guns, equipment packs, and coats. The boys took off everything and cast it away and went over the top with nothing but belt of ammunition and rifle, and in their shirt sleeves

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- July 19, 1918
- Got orders to take up position behind Infantry as their support. Dug five machine gun emplacements today, some tired when night came, but had to work on until 4 A.M. before the last one was completed

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- Our duty here was to hold the Boche in case of a counter attack, which we were expecting, as the Infantry was scattered and it took some time before they could get together again. They never came back at us. This is my first day under shell fire, and it is quite a lively place here

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- Everyone in the Company came out all O.K., with the exception of my gunner Wolfe who received a small wound in his face, caused by a piece of bursting shell. By this time the fighting units were torn up very badly, and we got orders to retire and reorganize the companies again, and take a little rest

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- July 21, 1918
- Came back to Brumetz our starting point. Here we were issued new uniforms and clean underwear. We then went to a nearby stream and took a bath, which was not very pleasant because the water was so cold it made our legs ache if we stayed in for a few minutes, but everyone plunged in, and it made us feel like a new bunch of men

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- We then went back and tried to content ourselves in pup tents. Received some cheering news from home. Got a good nights sleep the first for several days
- July 24, 1918
- Received orders to move up to the front. Were here held in reserve until July 27. We got orders to advance in support of the French and American Infantry

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- We unloaded the guns and ammunition from the trucks and started the advance through wheat fields with a woods for cover, crawling most of the time. We got to one place where we could see quite a large part of the sector we were going to take up, and it was certainly some scene to look upon. As far as the eye could see there were men everywhere

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- The Olive Drab mixed in among the Blue made quite a picture for one to look at. All were advancing in a thin line skirmish formation - Tanks, Infantry, Machine Gunners, Cavalry, Light Artillery, and lots of airplane, all moving forward. It was noon by now, and we came to a place where we had to cross the road

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- Here we learned that the French Cavalry could not find the Germans. The Major then sent for the transports to come up and in a short time we were going after the Boches in motor trucks. We went through Bomme to Bomme Forrest, about 50 kilometers, arriving about 3 P.M

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- Here we found plenty of dead Germans, horses, ammunition, equipment, and cannons that had been captured all strewn over the fields. German helmets by the hundreds lay around everywhere lost by them in their hurried retreat
- All the towns around here were in ruins, nothing but the walls standing, everything was battered to the ground and destroyed

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- We dug trenches near the edge of the woods for protection against artillery fire, and about 5 P.M. it commenced to rain, and Jerry opened his artillery on us and the French who were stationed nearby. A number of the French cannon and quite a few men were put out of commission, but they left us off easy for once

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- No casualties in Company. Eat a little corn-bill and hard tack. This was great help as we had nothing to eat or drink since early morning. We then prepared for a little nap in the muddy trenches. These are one man trenches, which we dug before dark. We are now able to sleep under heavy shell fire. Firing kept up all night

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- July 28, 1918
- At 1 A.M. we were awakened and told to eat breakfast and draw iron rations. At 2 A.M. were all lined up and told we were to advance with the 152nd French Infantry as their support. We then started our advance over the unknown land beyond. The enemy by now had opened up all their artillery and we were under heavy shelling all the time

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- There was lot of gas shells mixed with the high explosives and it made it very hard to keep together in the dark with a gas mask on, but we were lucky until day break when we lost a few men. 4:30 A.M. I think every Boche machine gunner and sniper on the enemy lines must of spotted us

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- There were bushels of lead flying around that small portion of the world, but we must have been a lucky bunch or the Dutchman very poor marksmen, as we all again came through all O.K. I had quite a few close ones here as shells were falling all around us and one put a hole in an ammunition box that I was carrying

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- We finally entered a forest in advance of Chateau Thierry and Meaux Crossroads
- Here we dug in, and believe me the boys all fought for a shovel as the shells were falling thick and fast and that will make any man want to dig in, and we all knew it from some past experiences

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- July 29, 1918
- 1 A.M. - Received what we thought a very strange order which read, “10th Machine Gun Battalion relieved without relief.” We hiked back to our cars through the dark, mud and rain, all very tired and worn out from being under strenuous shell fire and gas

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- We got out of trucks, ate breakfast and then sailed back through Bomme, Brumetz, and up over a big hill to the small village of Vially. On our arrival here we policed up the whole place before it was fit to be called a billet, as the Boches had just left a short time back and everything was in very bad condition

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- We settled down, cleaned up our equipment, and had a little rest. Here we signed the pay roll and mustered again.
- August 3, 1918
- Moved to Poin Park in a dense forrest. Jerry was not out of range this time for he and the rain soon made it miserable for us

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- We sent over lots of high explosives and plenty of gas. There is a large ammunition dump here and lots of supplies left by the Germans when making their hurried retreat. Plenty of dead Dutchmen too laying around here

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- August 4, 1918
- Moved again and Jerry was not satisfied with just shelling us so he sent over a few bombing planes and bombed our transports while on the move. It was inky dark and he had bad aim, but some very close ones as it just rained shrapnel all around, but everything came out O.K. and luck was with us again

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- It has rained so hard and long that the roads are like sponges, and are almost un-navigable for the heavy trucks, but our Old Henry Fords still could make it. By hard work pushing and pulling first one car and then another we finally landed in Cherry Chateau all O.K. 2 P.M. August 5

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- August 5, 1918
- Jerry sighted our position even before we got our cars parked, and sent us a barrage of high explosives for a starter. Some lively front. There was plenty of Jerry planes on the alert and he made good use of his heavy artillery whenever the opportunity came

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- He would put over a barrage at intervals of about every half hour lasting from 10 to 15 minutes at a time. There was lots of gas. Had few casualties here from gas
- August 6, 1918
- Went into action and put over a 45 minute barrage, shooting about 20,000 to 40,000 rounds into the Dutch

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- We were preparing for a counter attack, and also save the 39th Infantry from destruction. Slaughtered plenty of Dutchmen and lost more men ourselves, also put one of our guns out of action. artillery fire very heavy on this front

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- Wounded one man in my squad - Moten - and had a number of close ones myself. Lt. Swank, Sgt. Evans, Privates Kovnat and Kochowski were gassed. We then received relief and went back to Cherry and spent the night

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- August 7, 1918
- Went in on a different sector this time and worse than anything we had ever been in. Before we got up Jerry put down a searching barrage, and the last shell hit in the top of a big tree killing Potts, Gray, Batiman, Laughlin, and wounding Timmer, Dleary, Schmidt, Moats and myself. Corporal Fodnes was shell shocked

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- I then applied first aid myself and walked a mile to the first aid station. It was very painful walk as I was wounded in the left leg. Got an ambulance in a short while and then went to the nearest dressing station where I stayed for a few hours

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- Here the Red Cross workers gave us hot chocolate and cakes, which was quite a treat. This helped wonderfully to make us feel better, as we were all very hungry
- We were then loaded in an ambulance and taken to a Field Hospital farther to the rear

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- Here we were given a lot of papers to sign and asked a few dozen questions, and then give each of us a new number. We stayed here a few hours and then had another long ride to an Evacuation hospital. Arrived here 12:30 A.M., August 8, after an all night ride

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- Was wounded about 6 P.M. and operated on this morning at 3:30 A.M. After I had the piece of shell taken out was able to walk around a little, but when I woke up next morning there was so much pain I could scarcely move. Was taken from here to another Base Hospital

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- They certainly do have some system here as there is a steady stream of men going to and from the Operating Room all the time. There is always a patient under X-ray machine, one on the table taking ether and half dozen or more being operated on

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- No stop or wait at all when there is a big battle on. Sometimes some have to wait a day or more before their turn comes
- Stayed in bed for over a week and then walked on crutches for awhile. Stayed here in DeJoan for about a month and then went to Base Hospital 21, Bordenux. Stayed here from September 1 to October 7

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- October 7, 1918
  - Left Bordeaux and went as far as Tours. Stayed here all night and left next morning.
- October 10, 1918
  - Arrived at La Mana and stayed in the Casualty Camp for a few weeks

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- November 11, 1918
- The day of all days. News reached here shortly after 11 o'clock that the armistice had been signed and that fighting had ceased on the lines. The French people and everybody is just going wild. Lights in the towns for the first time for about four years