

Letters Home: Engineers, Transports & Signals

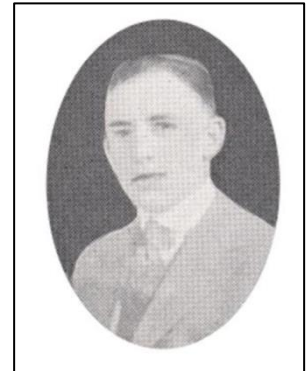
Edited by Trail End State Historic Site Superintendent Cynde Georgen

Between 1917 and 1919, *The Sheridan Post* and *The Sheridan Enterprise* donated considerable space to printing letters home from local soldiers and sailors serving both overseas and stateside. As part of the 2017-2018 *Wake Up America* exhibit, Trail End reprinted dozens of these letters, releasing them weekly via social media. For the most part, we have not changed the spelling of overseas locations, preferring instead to use the sometimes-creative spelling printed in the original articles.

These letters are from men who served with the Army Engineer Corps (in charge of making bridge and road repairs, maintaining communication lines, removing land mines and barbed wire, digging trenches, building shelters and barracks, providing clean water, and repairing miles of train tracks) and Motor Transport Corps (in charge of the army's new fleet of trucks). Those in the Signal Battalions were responsible for conducting point-to-point communications.

PAREN J. SHICKLEY – 316th Engineers

Born in Nebraska in 1894, Paren Shickley came to Sheridan shortly after 1910. His father was a railroad ticket agent who also operated a small mine near Kooi, Wyoming. Before the war Shickley was associated with Shickley Brothers Real Estate in Ranchester, and worked as an assistant bank cashier in Sheridan. He enlisted in the Army on June 13, 1917 and was assigned to the 316th Engineers, with whom he served until discharged in May 1919. After the war, Shickley worked briefly at banks in Buffalo and Thermopolis, Wyoming. By 1930, he was still in Thermopolis, but was woefully unemployed. He soon took up the mantle of traveling salesman in the Pacific Northwest, dying in Portland in September 1935. He is buried in Thermopolis. Like many soldiers from Sheridan, Shickley went to basic training at Camp Lewis, Washington. In this undated letter, published in *The Sheridan Post* in October 1917, Shickley describes the base during its early days.



Camp Lewis, till a short time ago known as American Lake, is in the center of a government reservation of 150 square miles. Up till a matter of four months ago, it was nothing much more than a wilderness, and there is still a good deal of timber around the edges, but now there is what you might call a good sized city here, laid out in well-kept streets with electric lights at every corner. All the comforts of home, you know, and all that sort of thing.

It covers a territory of about two by three and a half miles, and as far as you can see there is nothing but row after row of the contract barracks that are two story affairs with rubberoid roofing on them and built along the principles of a big barn. However, this country never gets so very cold, they say, and as long as the roof does not leak, we will be comfortable. Each of these barracks is supposed to house a whole company, and there are about 300 of them. Altogether, though, there are 900 buildings on the cantonment which includes stables, warehouses, exchanges and Y. M. C. A. buildings.

There is a base hospital here too which will accommodate 6,000 patients. It is a wonderful affair laid out in a series of small buildings, each one of which is a ward, and the whole thing is connected by porches. The principle of the whole thing was to be able to isolate any ward at any time by merely shutting the door and thereby prevent the spreading of any contagious disease. I had to go over there the other night to see a fellow, and I like to never go out of the place.

It is rather funny to watch the expressions on the faces of the boys as they get off the trains are immediately herded into a big roped-in space like so many cattle. Then they are sent down aisles one by one, and they each give their name and are checked off the list. Their qualifications are taken and then they are given a meal and a temporary place to sleep. About the next day they are attached to companies and are put to work either in the kitchen or around the barracks "policing up." They are also given drills of different sorts and the most of them seem to snap into it like they cared for it.

DONOVAN FREDERICK HURD – Student Army Training Corps Radio Operator School

Born in Sheridan in 1898, Donovan Frederick "Don" Hurd was the son of a printer and a doctor (his mother - Anna Glenn Hurd - was a physician who once operated a live-in women's clinic at the family home on West Kilbourne in Sheridan). Donovan went into his father's line of work: he was employed as a pressman at *The Sheridan Enterprise* in 1916, and later worked as a newspaper printer in Sacramento and Oakland, California. He capped his career by serving as secretary-treasurer of the International Typographer's Union, a position he held until his death in 1959. In September 1918, twenty year old Donovan was one of fifteen local enlistees selected by the army for special training. As a member of the Student Army Training Corps, he was sent to Colorado College in Colorado Springs where he entered radio operator school. The following letter to *Sheridan Enterprise* employees was sent from Colorado Springs on September 29, 1918.

NOTE: We do not have a photograph of Donovan Hurd in our files. If you know of one and you'd like to share it with us, please contact us at trailend@wyo.gov.

I supposed you think I am never going to write, but I really haven't had the time. This is sure a roller skating job - on the go all the time. We are learning to be radio operators. That means more than you might think. We have to be electricians, both senders and receivers in two different codes; mathematician, semaphore and wigwag signalmen; trained to drill and a few more things, all in two months and will not be out of quarantine for at least one week and maybe two. There is some talk of a two-weeks' furlough when we get through here, but I don't know whether it is true or not.

Tell everyone "hello" for me because I haven't time to write to very many. Things are not so bad here as they might be at that, but we won't get rich here very soon. I am enclosing my address and would sure like to hear from you fellows if you care to write.

I am getting along fine and have been put in an advanced class with the former electricians and telegraph operators, and I never knew a thing about either before I got here, so I am doing good. Some of the men from here will go to big eastern colleges and some to officers' training camps; some will be put in wireless stations immediately after leaving here, and some of the brainless wonders will go to regular training camps such as Camp Lewis. I don't suppose I will get to Yale or Harvard for more intensive training, but if I don't, I will most probably get to go to officers' training camp. That will be about as good. The chances are that it will be something pretty good if I can keep up with the advanced class.

EARL GORDON HAYWOOD – 26th Engineers

Twenty-three year old Sheridan High School graduate Earl Haywood was a roundhouse machinist for the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy railroad when he was inducted into the U. S. Army in September 1917. After completing basic training at Camp Lewis, Washington, he was sent to Camp Dix, New Jersey, for further training. During his five month stay at Camp Dix, Haywood had the opportunity to visit Atlantic City, Trenton and Camden, New Jersey, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and New York City. His letter describing a particularly memorable trip to The Big Apple

- written February 18, 1918 - was published in *The Sheridan Enterprise* on February 11, 1918. Shortly after the New York visit, Haywood was sent over to France with the 26th Engineers, where he fought at Meuse-Argonne and Vesle River. Following his honorable discharge in April 1919, he returned to his job at the CB&Q. He died in Story, Wyoming, in 1957, and is buried in the Masonic Section of the Sheridan Municipal Cemetery.



My, but I had a fine visit in New York City and will be one I will never forget. We left camp at 1 o'clock Saturday noon and changed trains in Trenton and caught a through train from Chicago. I never saw anything go so fast in my life as that train went, and we passed two trains loaded with soldiers that left camp at 12 o'clock, and we got to New York half an hour sooner than they did. At Jersey City they take off the engine and put on an electric locomotive, and then we went through the tubes under the Hudson River, which are many feet below the bottom of the river. As soon as the train leaves the tubes on the New York side, it is only a short ways to the Pennsylvania Station and there was where we got off. My, but it is a wonderful place, and the main waiting room is so high I believe an airplane could fly around and turn around in it.

We left the Pennsylvania Station and went to Brooklyn and caught a car down Broadway to the Woolworth Building and went to the top of it. The elevator takes you up to the fifty-fifth story and then you transfer to the elevator that takes you to the observation tower. It was sure cold on top and the most wonderful sight a person can ever expect to gaze upon. People down below look like little dots, and the wagons and street cars only look a few feet long. It was nearly 5 o'clock when we went up, so it was getting a little dark and foggy, but we got a beautiful view of the harbor and Statue of Liberty and several miles around. It only takes a few minutes to go up, and it makes one a little dizzy. When we came down, we went up to Union Square where they have the miniature battleship for recruiting station. We stayed at a hotel on Union Square.

After supper, which consisted of fresh oysters in the shell, and also fried oysters, dill pickles, potatoes, and several other things which only cost 80 cents apiece, we went to the Times Square. My, but it is a busy place and such big electric signs and all were running in view, so I guess coal shortage must be over. We went to the Hippodrome, but it was packed and standing room cost \$1, so we didn't go, but went to another.

After 10 o'clock we went down to the subway and rode several miles. The trains were packed and only stop every five blocks. There is a system of three tracks under the street, and trains go by every few minutes. Sure is a wonderful system, and everything is hurry up. Trains below the surface run about 50 miles per hour. We got off at Union Square and stayed around and then went to the hotel. It was 12 o'clock, but the streets were packed. Slept till 6:30 a.m. and then got up and walked around alone and about 9 o'clock came back to the hotel and woke up the other three boys, and then we went to the Municipal Building and over to the Brooklyn Bridge and walked across which is over 6,000 feet long and then rode back and went to the Pennsylvania railroad docks.

We went down along the river to the aquarium, which has thousands of fish in it. Looked around and saw some very interesting fish, such as big salmon, 6 feet long, and sea lions, but the most interesting things was what they called the sea horse. There was a case full of them, and they

resemble a horse without legs, but has a tail like a snake. The head is exactly like a horse, and its ears are fins and has a fin on its back. The greatest length is 7 inches, and it was a circus to see them swim around. It is the only fish that clings on bushes with its tail.

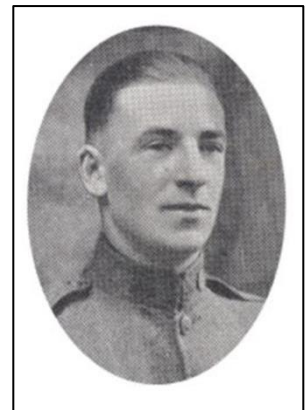
We left there and went to the elevated terminal and rode 106 blocks up Third Avenue, and in places it was four stories above the street. Got off at 106th Street as we didn't know where we were going, so walked over to Fifth Avenue and caught a bus with seats on top and rode down Fifth Avenue to 70th Street. Passed Vincent Astor's home which was sure beautiful, and then made a flying visit through Central Park. Also passed the Museum of Art, which was another massive building.

We walked down Fifth Avenue a little ways farther and then took the subway to the Grand Central Station. Had to walk to some street to get the subway, and we didn't know where we were going but landed in the Grand Central Station. Looked around a little and then took a subway for the Pennsylvania Station and ate dinner there. Walked around till 3:45 p.m. and then took a train for Trenton. We were in New York just 24-1/2 hours, and if any person could have seen the places of interest in such a short time, I would like to meet him. Of course, there are thousands of places that we never saw, but we covered a good deal of territory.

When we walked from Third Avenue to 106th Street to Fifth Avenue, the streets were jammed with little children out playing in the road. Sure glad that none of us were brought up there.

EARL RAY FRENCH – 32nd Engineers

Predictably known as "Frenchy," Earl French was born in Tulare, South Dakota, in 1886. He moved to Sheridan in the early 1910s and worked for Campbell's livery barn on East Brundage Street. He was later employed as a tieman for the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad. French was inducted into the United States Army in November 1917. He served overseas with the 32nd Engineers, where he attained the position of Master Engineer Junior Grade. Upon his honorable discharge in June 1919, French returned to Sheridan and went back to work on the CB&Q - this time as a brakeman. He later moved to the railroad towns of Sterling, Colorado, and Alliance, Nebraska, and finally to Calumet City, Illinois, where he died in 1978. French got his training at Camp Grant, Illinois, and headed overseas in June 1918. His first letter from France, dated June 23, 1918, was printed in *The Sheridan Daily Enterprise* a month later. Another letter, published in *The Sheridan Post* in August 1918, was sent from Bordeaux, France.



23 June 1918, Somewhere in France

Well friends - Here we are and raring to go.

We came over fine and dandy. The sea was as smooth as could be; no one got sea sick to amount to anything and got to camp and all the people here seemed to be glad to see us coming along. The boys were singing and laughing all the way. The country looks nice. The people are quaint and old-fashioned as can be. They remind you of the old pictures that were painted years and years ago.

All the boys want to be on their way to do their bit. Most every man you meet has the little gold bars on their sleeves, showing they have seen service at the front.

All the children salute you when they meet you.

Tell everybody hello and good luck from Frenchy when you see them, and I will try and drop a few lines once in a while.

Undated, sent from Bordeaux, France

You folks are surely doing your part back there as we are trying to do ours over here. Reports that come to us daily are most encouraging. It looks like the boys had the Huns on the run proper and before they are through they will find out that they have tackled a hornet's nest full of the toughest kind of fighting men they have ever met, and when the curtain comes down on the last act they will be about the sickest bunch of sour kraut eaters that ever deceived themselves into thinking that they could stand up before the two-fisted, hard hitting boys of the old U. S. A. These boys go over the top with a smile and a song, just as they do when they get mixed up with the mean bronc in the sage brush. It is all in the game.

They talk a great deal about the fine looking French girls over here, but let me tell you that if those I have seen are fair samples, I would not trade one U. S. A. girl for the whole kaboodle. They can talk all day but we cannot understand a word they say.

ALVIN THOMAS WENTZ – Army Transportation Corps

Alvin Wentz was born in Solville, Missouri, in 1889. After spending a few years driving an express wagon in Paola, Kansas, he moved to Sheridan shortly before 1910 and got a job as a locomotive engineer for the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy railroad. By June 1917, he had been married and divorced, was living in Baltimore, Maryland, and was working as a brakeman for the Pennsylvania Railroad. Wentz was back in Sheridan before March 1918, at which time he

joined the Army Transportation Corps. He served overseas in France, but it was not there that he experienced his greatest war-related adventure. That would have been in the fall of 1916, when the ship he was on was torpedoed off the coast of Ireland. His story was printed in *The Sheridan Enterprise* in March 1918. After the war, Wentz returned to Sheridan for a brief while before moving east to New York where he worked as an engineer. He died in Bayside, New York, in 1970.

NOTE: We do not have a photograph of Alvin Thomas Wentz in our files. If you know of one and you'd like to share it with us, please contact us at trailend@wyo.gov.

In the summer of 1916, I went across to Europe on a ship that carried ammunition and horses, being one of those in charge of the horses. We crossed all right and landed at Glasgow, Scotland. It was upon our return trip that we fell prey to the German submarine. We sailed from Glasgow on the steamship Marina and were about three days out when the attack occurred.

We were off the southern coast of Ireland and the morning of the third day out, the sea became very choppy and the waves swept across the deck, making it very dangerous. In the early afternoon the storm abated a little, and one of the sailors made the remark that there was no danger of submarines as the sea made it impossible for them to work.

Another sailor had just made the remark that they were nearly out of the danger zone, when without warning, a terrific explosion rocked the ship, striking the starboard side. The ship listed to one side, and there was a wild rush for the lifeboats. Twenty-three of us were lowered in one lifeboat and succeeded in getting away from the ship. I then espied the submarine which came up about a hundred yards from the ship, on the starboard side.

We had a gun mounted on the deck, and the gunner started to fire on the submarine. The captain of the ship whose name was Brown, ordered the gunner not to fire on the submarine because if he missed, the submarine would shell those in the lifeboats.

The submarine, seeing it was about to be fired upon, submerged. Captain Brown told men not to go far from the ship, as it would be several hours before it would sink and they would without doubt be rescued by that time. This caused many men to stay on the ship who might have gone in the lifeboats.

The first torpedo struck the ship about 3:45 p.m. and about fifteen minutes later another torpedo fired from the port side struck the vessel amidships and caused an explosion which put the wireless out of commission and stopped the engines. We were about a hundred yards away and the explosion threw missiles up in the air hundreds of feet. The ship broke in half and immediately started to sink. The ends tilted up and I could see men running up the deck and

jumping overboard. But it was too late then because they were taken down by the suction of the ship.

The ship folded up and disappeared beneath the waves. The captain went down with his ship and, in all, about forty-seven lost their lives.

The first torpedo killed two firemen and two coal passers. The vessel sank in about two minutes. The first engineer came up from below all covered with soot and a deep gash across his forehead, the blood spurting out and covering his face and clothes. He recovered from his accident, however.

After the ship went down, we saw only one other lifeboat afloat, there being four launched. To prevent being capsized by the waves, we had to keep the boat facing the storm and we had traveled sixty-five miles before we were rescued. We were without any lights and did not know where we were going. It was raining and continued to do so until about 2 o'clock in the morning when it turned into snow. About daylight the storm broke and cleared up until noon and started to rain again.

We sighted a tramp steamer in the distance and tried in vain to signal to them. A little later we saw another steamer, but again failed to attract their attention. It was one of the steamers that picked up the other boats and the occupants informed the captain that we were still adrift. Had it not been for this, we certainly would have perished as our boat was beginning to leak and it later sank a little while after we were rescued. The captain had sent out a patrol looking for us, and it was this boat that rescued us, in the bare nick of time. Through the storm in the distance, I could see a red light and with some difficulty lit two fuses, which burned a red light. The patrol saw us and, before they reached us, the fuses went out, leaving us in total darkness.

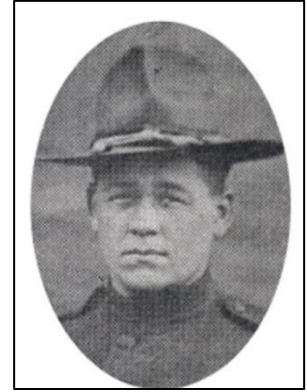
We were rescued about 8 o'clock and given dry clothes and hot food, for which we were mighty thankful. They took us to Newton Castle, Burhaven, Ireland. From there we were sent to Dublin. After spending a few days there we took a boat to Wales and then boarded a train from there to Liverpool, returning to Glasgow, Scotland. They held us there for several weeks and then we were put on board the Tuscania (which was recently sunk by a German submarine with American soldiers on board), arriving in New York last November.

Some of the boys could not come when we did as they had not sufficiently recovered from their exposure.

As a result of my experience in Europe and on the seas, though I am only 28 years old, I have many gray hairs. I suppose I will have more grey hairs as I am going back over again in the near future.

HARRY GEBO – 189th Transportation Corps

The son of Canadian immigrants, Harry Gebo was born in Fromberg, Montana, in 1900. He attended school in Parkman and Sheridan. Just a few days after his eighteenth birthday, the Parkman resident enlisted in the Army, where he was assigned to the 189th Transportation Corps. After the war, he returned to Sheridan County, working for the railroad and for the Kleenburn mine. He eventually moved to Oak Creek, Colorado, where he continued his life as a miner until shortly before his death in 1975. On November 14, 1918, Harry wrote a lengthy letter to his father, George Gebo. The reason? It was “Dad’s Day,” a day on which all soldiers were asked to write home to their fathers. Gebo’s letter was published in *The Sheridan Daily Enterprise* on January 10, 1919.



Dear Dad: This is dad’s day over here, so am dropping you a line. I think I am allowed to explode myself now and tell you where I am. Well, take a map and look up the part of St. Nazaire. I landed in Brest after seven days’ riding on the pond. I stayed at Brest for eight days, and all that time we slept in dog tents. It rained seven days out of the eight.

Well, one morning about 3 o’clock we had to get up whether we wanted to or not, and of course you know I wanted to. Our packs we soon rolled, and pretty soon we were all leaving camp, three companies of us, about 750 men. We marched about three miles to the coast where we landed and took out what the French call a train, but it would make a fine watch fob, and then I doubt if it would be large enough. We stayed there for about three hours before we pulled out. They hooked a couple of little French engines on us and along came a French switchman and gave three blasts with a horn and away we went.

There were forty men in one car, including rifles, packs, and grub; so you see we had lots of room. I got over in the corner and sat down on my pack near a window. Our car was about 10 x 14 feet and had four wheels under it without any springs. I guess we got to going about 15 miles an hour and our car started to bump and rock. We traveled about three hours and stopped. We all got off and got water to drink and a rest from our cramped position, then we started again. A large U. S. engine had us this time and the way we sailed was not slow. We bounced so much that when we stopped again I still kept on bouncing for half an hour at least.

At supper time we opened tomatoes, corned beef, and had jam and bread to go with it. We were all hungry and ate like hogs. One thing we had plenty of bread and other grub. Soon it got dark and we were still rambling and bouncing along, about eight o’clock most of us got sea sick. [ILLEGIBLE] the car that there was hardly room to stand up. Some of the fellows were stretched

out all over the floor and some were on their knees. I was all cramped up in the corner and I fell asleep about midnight and rolled off my pack on another fellow and he got up and fell over someone else and we almost had a battle royal for a little [ILLEGIBLE] stopped some place along the line about three in the morning and stayed there for about six hours. It was sure a relief to us to get the rest. We traveled from 9 a.m. until nearly 4 o'clock in the afternoon and we got off at St. Nazaire. We [ILLEGIBLE] to go about a hundred yards from the railroad track to tents and unload. It was one great relief to get washed up and get a bed made. I hit the hay and I like to never woke up the next morning.

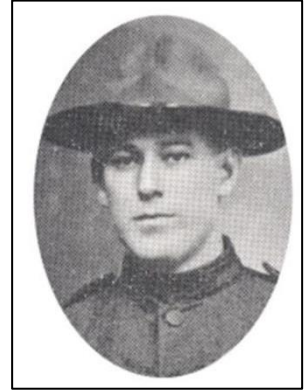
I am at Camp Gron and it is not a bad camp. It's small and there are about three thousand railroaders in it. We keep supplies moving to the front. Our company came over as railroad men, but I am one that is not a railroad man. I didn't know what I was going to do but soon found out that I had a job. They sent me down here to the office and made an engine dispatcher out of me. Well, I have made good at it so far and now have the night shift which is not so much going on at night as in the day. I have been at the same camp ever since I came over. When we come across, we had rifles, bayonets, and we had gas training before we came across so I thought sure we were going to the front to relieve some outfit up there, as we are a casual outfit. When they took our guns away from us, I said to myself, says I, "Here's hoping the Kaiser's dome is knocked off before I get that rifle back," and sure enough it has been. Now all that's worrying me is how I can get home the quickest.

St. Nazaire is a pretty good sized place and is a clean town. It is on the coast. When I go up town, I always go down the coast and look out over the waters. Many a time I have seen boats go through the locks and wondering just how soon I would be starting back towards God's country.

Now I will tell you about my trip across. We got onto the ship Great Northern about three days before she pulled out. We set sail about two o'clock in the afternoon, and it was a beautiful day. As we passed old Statue of Liberty, I says, "Say, old girl, I hope I see you again," but, believe me, if I do and she wasn't to see me again after I pass her, she is going to have to about face to do it because I've done my last water riding. For three days we had pretty bad weather, and our boat rocked fierce. The northern Pacific and the big German interned boat came with us. The first day out had one destroyer with us, and it turned back on the second day. We made the trip alone until we were about two days' ride from Brest. Nine torpedo boat destroyers met us. We spent the rest of the time watching them run in and out between the boats. They sure can travel. In the afternoon just before we landed in Brest, one of the destroyers came up pretty close to the right side of our boat and dropped a depth bomb. Talk about water going up in the air. They almost raised the ocean. Three German caps, oil and several floating obstacles were seen on the water. So I leave it to you to imagine what was hit.

WILLIAM AUGUST BLANSKY – 44th Engineers

Bill Blansky was born in Riverton, Illinois, in 1894. By the age of eighteen, he was living and working in Sheridan County, Wyoming. The son of a German-born coal miner, Bill Blansky entered the family business when he was just a teenager. From 1912 until he entered the service in 1918, Blansky worked as an underground coal miner at the Sheridan Coal Company mines in Dietz, Wyoming. After the war, he returned to Dietz, but was unable to get a job there. By 1923, he'd gone to work for the Acme Coal Company, but that job only lasted a few years: in December 1927, Blansky died at the age of thirty-three, leaving behind a wife and two or three small children. During the war, Bill Blansky served as a Private First Class with the 44th Engineers. His letters home - mostly to his sister, Anna Kawamoto - were short and somewhat repetitive, but with good reason: censorship.



13 August 1918

Dear Sister - I suppose you have been wondering why I haven't been writing. I am now in France. I like it as far as I have seen. It seems sort of strange to not be able to talk to people. I can't tell you just where I am, but I guess it doesn't make much difference. I haven't received any letters here, but being so far from home we can't expect to hear from each other very often. I don't know of any more to write just now, but I will write later. Tell everybody hello for me.

21 August 1918

Dear Sister - I am well; we have changed camps since I wrote you the last letter. I like it better here. I have learned a few words in French since I have been here. When I get back, you will wonder what I am saying for I may forget and think I am in France. To tell the truth, it doesn't seem as though I am in another country, for all of the boys are here. I was glad to get the clippings you sent. There is an American paper printed here, but it does not give much news of the states.

I haven't heard from [mama] since I left Fort Benjamin Harrison. I guess they are busy getting in the crops. I guess I don't have to worry much about the mine this winter, but I hope I will be home next winter. It is getting dark now, and we have to use candles for light so I will have to close. Tell everybody hello for me and don't worry as I am getting along fine.

6 September 1918

Dear Sister - Just a few lines to let you know I am well. You said in your last letter you sent me a box of cigarettes. I didn't receive them. I don't know if I will ever get them; but I may, as I was in

New Jersey when they were sent. After this, don't send packages of any kind, as you remember about me telling you I won't receive them.

Everything is about the same here. I guess I won't know the railroad when I get home again, will I? Have they gotten as far as Dietz with the double track? There are two things I miss in France and they are ice cream and candy. There is a movie here. They show some good pictures, but you can't make much out them as the leads are all in French. I don't know of anything else to write, so I will close. Tell everybody hello for me.

24 September 1918

Dear Sister - I haven't received any mail from you for a week, but expect you are still well. I am well. I am working pretty hard these nights. I sleep most of the day time. I guess you wonder why I don't write oftener than I do, but there isn't much to write about here and there are things which we cannot write about, which may be interesting for the people at home

It is getting a little cooler at night here. Some French men told me that they don't have much snow here, and I hope they don't. I received the cigarettes yesterday and I sure thank you for them, for I have not seen or smoked a Camel cigarette since I left the states. Hoping this letter finds you well. I will close for this time.

15 October 1918

Dear Sister - I received your long looked for letter a few days ago. I am glad to hear you are well. I am well and hope to stay so. There has been a little frost here, but it hasn't been cold. I am working nights and have been for a month. I like the work I am doing pretty well. Well, I don't know any more to write, so I will close, hoping to hear from you soon.

22 October 1918

Dear Sister - Received your letter of Sept. 15 today. I also received a letter from mother; glad to hear you are all well. I am well and working every night. It rains quite a little here; we all have our winter underwear on and will have stoves in our barracks in a few days. Some of the fellows think they are having some hardships to stand, but if we do, I don't know where it is. But you know there are some fellows that would find cause to kick if they were in a football game.

Mother didn't write much. I suppose she thinks I am listening to the cannons roar, but no such luck, for the only cannon I hear is at a training camp not so very far from us. I don't know of anything else to write in the way of news that would interest you ... but you just wait until I get back. I will have some news to tell you that will keep you awake at nights! I guess I will have to close, hoping to hear from you often, so good-bye.

JOSEPH ANDREWS SARGENT – 2nd Engineering Battalion

Born in Michigan in 1872, Joseph Sargent had a degree in civil engineering and a hankering to see the world. After serving with the 2nd U. S. Engineers during the Spanish-American War, he traveled to France, Germany, Spain, Switzerland, Italy and the Dominican Republic to work on hydroelectric projects. When war broke out in Europe, Sargent was commissioned as a Captain with the 2nd Engineering Battalion. Unlike most soldiers, his family accompanied him to France; his wife and children lived in a village near Paris. Although not a Sheridan resident, Joseph Andrews Sargent was not unknown to Sheridan residents; he visited the county before the war while serving with the U S Geological Survey and still had friends in the area. His strident letter, detailing the hardships of the French people and the evils of Germany, was published in *The Sheridan Daily Enterprise* on June 8, 1918.



There is not much to say beyond the things you already know, that we all have one big job on our hands, but we are glad to be able to do it.

When you see on all sides the French people - old men and old women, young women and children - working long hours in the field to make each little bit of land produce its share, it makes you feel that all that anyone can do for his country certainly is little enough.

Old French men and women have continued to cultivate their gardens and grain fields right up to the ends of the shelled areas. And often inside of the areas, they will figure where the German shells are falling and then will cultivate the fields on the reverse hill side slopes where the shells very seldom fall. And, except when the French officer commanding the sector orders them out for their own safety, they continue to live in their ancient tile roof, moss-covered houses right up to the hour when the German batteries begin to shell their villages.

The commanding officer sends a couple of French soldiers to help the old people load their scant possessions and they trudge off down the long white winding road. Sometimes they take what they have in a hand push-cart. Sometimes they have an old horse left and a cow and a dog and cat and a few chickens, a white rabbit and a cart load of old household furniture. They take it away sadly, of course; but at the same time bravely, and without complaint. Above all, they are profoundly grateful that America finally awoke to the great danger that civilization, as we know it, was being crucified by the Prussian beast of despotic military greed. And they all seem to feel that now we are in it, we have got to make a good job of destroying the monster - and everyone knows that half way measures are no remedy. Saint George did not destroy the dragon by

putting salt on the dragon's tail. He SLEW the dragon, if I remember the story correctly. And that is what we are here for. Mercy to the MERCIFUL, but iron justice to the MERCILESS.

We have been in many historic places of France. A while ago I was near the old castle where Richard Couer de Leon (Richard the Lion Hearted, Richard Plantagenet) was born. Recently I was along a trail where Julius Caesar, a few years before Christ (in 50 and some odd years B. C.), found the early Germans. And again we were near one of the places where Attila, the original Hun, who called himself the Scourge of God, was finally beaten and driven out of France. Also I was on part of the early battlefield where Charles Martel defeated the Saracen hordes, who tried to conquer the early Christians and make Mohammadanism the world's religion.

In the end - all of the would-be conquerors who placed GREED and LUST OF POWER above HUMAN KINDNESS have had to give way to men who KNEW they were RIGHT and also FOUGHT TO THE FINISH rather than be made SLAVES. And of course, THAT is what will be the ultimate end of the vast German military scheme of world conquest, based upon general hatred of all that tends toward human liberty and also based upon scientific devil worship.

The German government, as at present constituted, made the ancient blunder of setting up the false gods and worshipping a new kind of brazen image, and that government has got to be brought to reason by a GREATER FORCE (based on righteousness), than it could itself bring forth. No matter how long it takes, German militarism is going to be beaten - and every man here is glad to do what he can to speed the day, hoping that sooner or later the German people themselves will cease to be CATTLE and strike for LIBERTY.

LEO ALOYSIUS DOYLE – 469th Engineers/Transportation Corps

Lee Doyle was a student at Sacred Heart College when he registered for the draft in June 1917. Prior to entering college, Doyle attended Sheridan High School and worked as a caller for the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad (before everyone had telephones, a caller was employed to run messages to engineers and other railroad employees, letting them know of shift changes and so forth). His last job with the CB&Q, in 1916, was as a supplyman. In the army, Doyle put his railroading skills to good use, serving as a Sergeant with the 469th Engineers. He later transferred to the Transportation Corps. After the war, Doyle completed his studies and was ordained a priest of the Society of Jesuits. After serving a short time in St. Louis, Missouri, he went on to work at the Holy Rosary Mission at South Dakota's Pine Ridge Reservation, and at St. Stephen's Mission on Wyoming's Wind River Reservation.



Dear Ones at Home - It's surprising how quickly one can accustom himself to new conditions and surroundings and the novelty wears off. Of course, this is different than army life previous to reaching Tours, for then I didn't know what was in store for the next day, where I was going, etc., but now I have fallen into the routine of the office, the strangeness of the work is gone, and the days slip by quickly. ... I like it fine. I am well and happy; must have gained ten pounds at least since joining the army.

I just came from the paymaster where I got two months' wages minus insurance, deductions and laundry. We haven't been paid for two months and consequently we are either broke or in the red. I suppose there will be some celebrating tonight, but a dollar a day don't go far.

We get paid in French money and it seems considerable. The franc is the standard coin, and one dollar in American money is worth 5.70 francs, and as \$30 is worth 171.00 francs, it seems like a lot, but I don't think it brings as much as the \$30 would in New York City.

Tuesday I was invited ... to a French restaurant for a French dinner and to give you an idea of how much a franc will bring, I will give the menu of what I had: Soup, egg omelet, small portion of roast beef and some carrots, hunk of war bread, black coffee, strawberries with no cream or sugar - six francs [a little over a dollar; a meal like that in Sheridan at the time would run less than twenty-five cents]. I just can't see it at all. The Y.M.C.A. puts up a good meal here for three francs.

Friday was the Feast of the Sacred Heart and I went to communion. Also served mass. We now have an American Chaplain, Father Lynch, S. J. [Society of Jesuits] and a fine man. He is going to get a Knights of Columbus building here and other things. ...

I have no time for further writing now. I will try and write you twice a week as I think that is as often as would be possible. Much love to all. Keep happy and smiling.

FRANK LESLIE ARCHER – Army Engineer Corps

Forests were Frank Archer's life. Before the war, he worked as a clerk for the Shoshone National Forest supervisor in Cody, Wyoming. After the war, he was the supervisor of the Bighorn National Forest in Sheridan, and later worked as an assistant forest supervisor in Lander. During the war, however, he had to focus on something else: supplies. He worked in the Supply Section of the Army Corps of Engineers during his time in France. Which meant that he was busy, busy, busy all the time. Even though they were behind enemy lines and relatively safe, Archer and his fellow soldiers had little time to explore their environs. When they did, however, their limited knowledge of French language and customs made for some interesting

experiences. In this letter, published in *The Sheridan Post* in January 1918, the forty year old forester provides a glimpse into the “personal side” of life “Somewhere in France.”

NOTE: We do not have a photograph of Frank Leslie Archer in our files. If you know of one and you’d like to share it with us, please contact us at trailend@wyo.gov.

Time seems to be at a premium here, especially among employees of the war department. The whole organization is running on high all the time. Everybody has to keep at it practically seven days in the week. ... It is a pretty hard grind, but only what could be expected and what should be in war time. Most of the fellows who come over know what they were going up against when they started and are not surprised. We did not come over for a picnic.

There is very little time for recreation or sightseeing except at night and then most of us are too tired to go much. Besides, “Somewhere,” like many other cities, is not well lighted and it is hard to get anywhere with a meager knowledge of French. Though the people are all very kind and willing to help us out all they can when we can make ourselves understood.

I am especially delighted with the little tots here. Some of the real small boys and girls give us the French military salute when we pass them and seem quite put out if we happen to hurry by without noticing them and returning the salute. Others will take hold of our hands, walk along a little way, and then say goodbye and go on about their play.

I had hoped to acquire a considerable knowledge of French by this time, but have been so busy at the office and trying to get located that there seems little time to devote to it. However, with the few words and sentences I learned before leaving Cody and those I picked up on the way over, I am able to order ham and eggs and a few other necessities of life without causing a great deal of disturbance in the restaurants. ...

As soon as we landed [in France] we were taken to a rest camp where very good accommodations were provided, and early next morning ... we were met by men from the office who piloted us to headquarters, and after we had reported for duty, to the hotel. At the hotel we found we could get room with bath, including breakfast for 13 francs. MacDonald and I decided to double up and were allotted a very nice large room quite elaborately furnished, with fire place and even a clock on the mantle but could not seem to locate the bath which was supposed to go with the apartment. We did discover a door, however, on which was inscribed on a copper plate the name of “Salle de Bain,” and began to wonder who Miss Bain was and if we would have the pleasure of meeting her. Upon referring further to our French dictionary, however, we decided that the room with the name on it was our bath room.

After considerable discussion we decided to enter the place anyhow. We found a very elaborate bath room but no hot water. After considerable difficulty we got in touch with a person whom we took to be the chief janitor or porter, also a maid and told them by means of considerable gesticulation mingled with French and English that we had been three days and nights with our clothing on and desired hot water for our bath. After more exchange of sign and languages we were given to understand that there was no hot water available and would not be until Saturday, also that nothing in the heavens above nor the earth beneath or the waters which were under the earth could move any hotel keeper to provide hot water for his guests before that time. We were certainly in distress, but there seemed no help for it. I can stand a cold bath in a warm room or a hot bath in a cold room, but a cold bath in a cold room is a bit too much even for a fellow who spent the winter of 1916-17 in Wyoming.

In the morning we found that the breakfast included in the price of the room consisted of chocolate, bread and butter and a very small portion of omelet. We were too hungry to stand for that so we ordered some good old bacon and eggs, coffee, fruit, etc., which we found to be quite expensive. The French people don't make much of breakfast. The big meal of the day is apparently supper, and they like to take all the time there is to eat it. I doubt if they understand what the word hurry means.

We have had so much trouble getting breakfast in time to reach the office on time that we are now preparing a light breakfast in our room. We find we can cook it and eat while we are giving an order in the hotel or average restaurant. It may be they know how to make good coffee, but so far I have been unable to get such a thing. Nearly everybody drinks wine or beer with their meals. I don't care for beer at meals and the wine is fierce, so just drink water except in the morning when I frequently make a fair cup of coffee in my room.

I have been making a little study of the food situation, and find that a person can purchase most anything in the way of food here if he is willing to pay the price. There seems to be plenty of bread of good quality. It is rather dark, resembling graham bread, and I rather like it. I have not seen any white bread as yet. It is apparently prepared only in the one shape, viz: loaves anywhere from 2-1/2 feet to 3-1/2 long and from 3 to 5 inches thick. It is sold by weight and one can get a hunk off one of the above described loaves ... for 35 centimes.

There is apparently considerable meat here and it costs about the same as in the states. Extra good lamb chops, for instance, come at about 2 francs. Bacon is rather scarce and high. It is seldom served at the restaurants. We have not experienced any meatless days as yet. Eggs come at about one-half franc each, and are good and fresh. I have not as yet been served what seemed to be a strong egg. Good butter costs about 5 francs per pound. It is not served regularly at the restaurants and has to be ordered special generally.

At present I am in about as much danger as I would be running a jitney around Cody, and so far as I know will remain here indefinitely. Orders, however, change overnight, and a man is liable to have to move on any time.

EDWARD CURTIS CONLEY – 2nd Field Signal Battalion

Edward Conley was born in Stephenson, Michigan in 1884. In 1916, he was living in Sheridan, working as an electrician at the Sheridan Sugar Factory. When it came time to join the army, he didn't hesitate; he enlisted in Sheridan in August 1917, just two months after National Registration Day. In November of that same year, he was commissioned as a 1st Lieutenant with the 2nd Field Signal Battalion. During his service in France, Conley was both gassed and wounded. In recognition of his "valorous service," he was awarded the Croix de Guerre (War Cross) by the French Government. Conley's letters home from France and Germany were published in *The Sheridan Daily Enterprise*, one of two local papers. In them, he tended to wax philosophical about the nature of war and man's inhumanity to man. The following undated letter, published in June 1918, includes his well-articulated views on the army, the enemy and how the war is going for both sides.



I certainly was very glad to hear from Sheridan, and, believe me, that these people all know that Sheridan, Wyo., is on the map. They have dubbed me "Sheridan Ed," on account of my persistent advertising.

I have now been in the trenches for three months and, believe me, that in that time, we certainly let the Huns know that we came from the good old U. S. Furthermore, they are having more respect for us every day.

We are making history every day, and there is no use of me telling you anything because a few days ago I saw some U. S. papers and everything was authentic. I am positive you can believe everything you read.

I know the more I am in the game, the more I want to be. I am only sorry that I cannot do more than I can. I have learned a lesson that is hard for any civilized person to learn. It is certainly hard for any civilized person who lives in a free country to learn that this earth was infested with a barbarous race of supposed humans that had any rattlers or wild beasts backed off of the map, for loving to deal out the most dastardly kinds of dirty work. Nevertheless, we have so far coped with the situation and, believe me that every one of our men has the highest morale and

we are all raring to go. We have a wonderful army, and it is soon going to be proved that we COUNT!

Our men are in wonderful shape, both physically and mentally. Venereal disease and other pestilence that have been so common in armies are nil. It is certainly wonderful to know that we are backed with the greatest corps of medicos that ever lived. Everybody is doing their bit, because we all know that we want to do for all those that like to get in and can't.

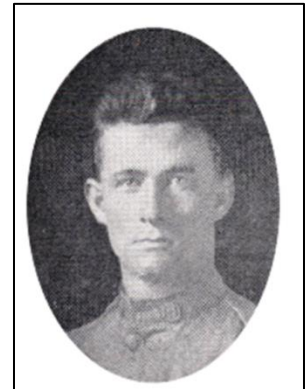
I am plugging away, doing my daily grind. So far have not won any Croix-de-Guerre, or other medals. Nevertheless, am trying to. The combined combinations [of artillery] that we have here and there are the ones that Kaiser Bill has to reckon with. With such spirit we are going to put it across, and I am not talking from a flattering or egotistical point of view.

I am glad that Sheridan is going to the limit, and that's the sky. It certainly does sound and feel good when you read or hear that your part of the country is doing their share. I know it comes hard for many, but after seeing the true aspect, I do believe that anyone would sacrifice a whole lot more than they think.

I have been interrupted a number of times and not being much of a scribe anyway, you will have to pardon composition. I am writing under difficulties, and will have to ring off. Give my regards to all the boys and print what you may of this if you wish, if you think it will help.

ARTHUR LOUIS ROEBLING – 44th Engineers/148th Transport Corps

By February 1919, twenty-six year old Clearmont farmer Arthur Roebling had already been in the army for nine months. As part of the 44th Engineers and (later) the 148th Transportation Corps, he had served in both England and France. He was about to head even farther afield! The Polar Bear Expedition - also known as the American North Russia Expeditionary Force - was a contingent of about five thousand American troops who went to Arkhangelsk (Archangel), Russia, as part of the American intervention in the Russian Civil War of 1918. Corporal Roebling was one of these troops, whose primary job was to prevent stockpiles of Allied war materials - originally intended for the Eastern Front - from falling into the hands of Bolshevik revolutionaries. Roebling made it back from Russia and was honorably discharged from the Army in August 1919. He returned to Clearmont where he lived and worked as a farmer/rancher until his death in 1965. He is buried the Sheridan Cemetery.



Dear Folks - Well, this don't seem like the last day of February to me. I really expected to be in the U. S. A. by that time, but now I don't think I will see that part of the world for a few months at the very least.

I am in St. Pierre Des Corps today on my way to northern Russia. This is our first move, and I don't think we will be here long, then to England where we will be equipped for our expedition. You no doubt have seen in the papers what the object of our expedition is, and I don't know how much I can tell regarding our trip, but I guess the censor will pass this much.

There are several others from around Clearmont going with me; when our government called for volunteers, Powder River was the first represented, same as in other cases. [Fred] Reinhart, who used to work for the Leiter Estate, Guy Drake of the X4 outfit, and myself are the only ones from the Clearmont vicinity, but many others from Wyoming are going, mostly from the Sweetwater country, and a goodly part from Alaska.

I expect to find it very cold at our destination (Archangel), I think, but I prefer cold from rain. It rains every day here and you can imagine conditions in general. But my nature naturally calls for a change all around and I think will be perfectly satisfied in Russia.

Well, there are not many of the boys left who came over with the old 44th Engineers, scattered all over France, and soon Russia, and I guess there are many friends of mine I won't get to see again. So for their benefit I wish you would publish this letter so they can communicate with me later.

Shortly before he left for Russia, Roebling had the opportunity to explore a little bit of France. Here are some of his impressions:

Today finds me back with my company again after visiting some of the sights of France. I was in Paris. I only stayed there one day, but surely had a good time! I spent most of my time in Cannes, surely a wonderful city on the Mediterranean Sea. I visited some of the most ancient buildings in the world. I sure filled up on oranges and other fruit while there. ...

I visited Monte Carlo, where they have the largest gambling halls in the world and that's where the game got its name. Nothing but nobility habitates this city and the suicides are many, caused by gambling, going broke and no other thing left but suicide. During the heavy gambling season, deaths average about twenty per week. ...

I was in Prince Albert's throne room and just like us Americans, three of us climbed in the throne chair just to see how it felt to sit in a prince's chair, and the French guide nearly had a fit. I was the first to get in it and there was room for two more. We had just as much respect for the prince's chair as we did for any other. ...

I was in Italy a short way, but the A. E. F. is not allowed far into Italy. The Alps Mountains are surely wonderful, but not as pretty as our Big Horns. They are more historic because they are older and the work of nature shows better from a distance, but I like the Big Horns best.