

# Letters Home: Wyoming National Guard

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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.

Dozens of Sheridan County men joined the Wyoming National Guard soon after war was declared in April 1917. When the Guard was nationalized for overseas service in September 1917, it became part of the United States Army and was reformed into several groups, including the 148th Field Artillery and the 116th Ammunition Train. Both served overseas with great distinction.

## **EDWARD H. BITZER – WNG/148<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery**

Private First Class Edward H. “George” Bitzer was an Iowa boy, born and bred. 1917 found the twenty-eight year old in Sheridan County, however, living in Verona with a wife and child. Bitzer joined the Wyoming National Guard soon after war was declared, later serving with the 148th Field Artillery. In this undated letter from Camp Mills, New York (printed in *The Sheridan Daily Enterprise* in November 1917), Bitzer tells of his unit’s train trip from Fort Russell (near Cheyenne) to Camp Green (near Charlotte, North Carolina).

NOTE: We do not have a photograph of George Bitzer in our files. If you know of one and you’d like to share it with us, please contact us at [trailend@wyo.gov](mailto:trailend@wyo.gov).

*... At last the much longed for orders to entrain had arrived, and after the task of loading our equipment into the cars, we were soon giving farewell to Fort Russell and Cheyenne.*

*Various cities along the route were designated as exercising points where we would leave our stuffy coaches for a few hours, exercise and drill. This was indeed a welcome relief from the tiresome monotony of the coaches. Our first stop of this nature was at Grand Island, Neb. We were somewhat surprised at the size of this city, and enjoyed very much marching through the main streets, but owing to the early hour there were but very few people upon the streets.*

*At Omaha a similar stop was made after a pleasant ride along the Platte river. We took a walk through some very dirty and dusty streets while the water supply of the coaches and cook cars*

*were replenished. We were only too glad when we were on the move again and moving eastward.*

*The muddy Missouri River was crossed at this point. The water being so muddy as to resemble liquid mud, it was promptly called "The River of Army Soup," which is indeed an unkind expression, as the soup and food served thus far is the best obtainable and of such proportion as to be nourishing and sustaining.*

*Having crossed the Missouri River, we were in the wealthiest agricultural State in the Union, this being Iowa, of course. It was in this State that we were feted and honored as much as the short time would allow. At Boone, Iowa, we were given a much appreciated reception by the citizens of this enterprising community. After a brief march through the business section, we were taken to a hall where we were each presented with apples, pies, cakes, peaches, flowers and magazines. This spirit of hospitality and patriotism was greatly appreciated, and as the train pulled out from the depot and the assembled multitude, cheer after cheer rent the air; all of us were doing our utmost in this way to show our appreciation of their kindness.*

*Brief stops were made at the cities of Carrol, Cedar Rapids and Clinton. The far-famed Mississippi River was crossed at this latter place, and many looked for the first time upon the "Father of Waters," which at this early hour was covered with a dense fog. It was indeed a keen disappointment to be unable to see this beautiful river at its best.*

*Crossing the State of Illinois at the time of year when the fields of corn are a beautiful brown, and the yellow pumpkins mingling between the corn rows. The trees, whose leaves were fast turning to golden tints, gave a relief to the sea of corn. It was indeed as if we had come into a fairy land. On every side, stretching as far as the eye could reach, were fields of corn. We became weary of looking at corn fields and began to wish for dinner time; imagine our dismay upon receiving corn for dinner!*

*At Chicago, a brief stop was made for exercise as well as to again replenish the water and food supply. The dirty and grimy appearance of the buildings and the ragged, dirty urchins gave us all a desire for a hurried departure from this city.*

*A night's run through the rich agricultural State of Indiana brought our train of seventeen coaches to Cincinnati, Ohio, where we stayed a short time enjoying such sights as were available from the car window. Crossing the historic Ohio River, we were soon among the rolling hills of Kentucky, the famous Blue Grass State. It was in this State that we saw for the first time those harbingers of the Southland in the way of tobacco fields, cotton plantations, sugar cane and many other products peculiar to the South.*

*At Russel, Ky., we had an opportunity to put our feet upon Kentucky soil for the first time. A march through the shaded streets of this beautiful little city was indeed a welcome relief, as the need of exercise was beginning to be apparent.*

*As we progressed southeastward, the Kentucky hills began to grow larger and larger until we were traveling through mountain gorges and gazing with interest upon the wooded slopes of the Appalachia highlands. We viewed with interest and a feeling of wonder at the apparent hardships the people of this locality undergo in obtaining their livelihood by tilling those stony and steep mountain sides. The angle of some of the fields viewed from the train was so steep as to make the use of horses and agricultural implements utterly impossible. All the work must certainly be done by hand, from the clearing away of the luxuriant vegetation to the planting and harvesting of the crops. ...*

*A brief stop at Erurn, Tenn., was made for exercise after which we soon crossed into North Carolina. Dark green hills and mountains with clouded peaks loomed about us everywhere. Our train making hundreds of seemingly impossible curves and over foaming cataracts. Lonely cabins of mountaineers would be occasionally passed, and scarcity of horses were noted for some distance. At least a hundred miles were covered before a horse was seen.*

*Words cannot, however, express the beauty and grandeur of this section through which we passed all too quickly. It was with a feeling of regret that we left this picturesque country and emerged gradually into fertile and productive country, for soon the plantations of cotton and cane began to take the place of the pine and fir trees, to which we had been accustomed to view upon lofty peaks and changing to dangerous precipices.*

*Arriving at our destination after a five days' ride, seeing many strange places and being feted and cheered at many places, we arrived at our destination - Charlotte, N. C. - a tired but happy lot. ...*

Bitzer never made it back to Wyoming; he was killed at Chery-Chartreuve, France, on August 5, 1918, when a high explosive shell landed near the artillery guns he was manning. Buried where he fell, his remains were later transferred to the Oise-Aisne American Cemetery in Fere-en-Tardenois, France.

## LELIUS CHESTER ZANDER – WNG/148<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery

Twenty-two year old Lelius Zander was working as a brakeman for the Chicago Burlington & Quincy Railroad in 1917 when he registered for the draft. A previous member of the Wyoming National Guard (in which he served as a bugler), Zander re-enlisted in that same organization in September of that year. Later that month, Sergeant Zander wrote from the 148th Field Artillery's training camp near Charlotte, North Carolina, about the Wyoming boys' impact on Camp Greene and the surrounding community. His letter was published in *The Sheridan Daily Enterprise* under the headline "Girls All Warned To Hide When Wyoming Boys Reached N. C., But Now They Darn and Dance and Life Is Pretty Soft."



*You will no doubt be surprised to learn that we have transferred into artillery now. We moved our quarters to a different place in order to have all artillery together. The headquarters company still exists, only it has one hundred and sixty-six men instead of twenty-two men. Instead of being the Wyoming Regiment, we are now the 148th Artillery.*

*The Wyoming boys certainly have made quite a hit here. The first two nights we were here we didn't see any girls down town, not many of them at least. We were wondering why that was; so at a dance last Friday night one of the girls explained that the papers told every mother to keep their daughter at home when we came. They expected us to jump on our horses, ride through town and shout all the windows out. It is a fact that they actually published that. You can see what the South thought of us. Now, any of them will tell you that we are as polite or more so than their own home boys. Several of the boys, while walking down the street, have been asked in to dinner by the residents. One day of each week some of the girls from town come up and do our mending. What do you think of that? Pretty soft, I claim!*

*Day before yesterday I saddled a bronc with my stock saddle and rode down town. You ought to have seen the people stop and look. You could see heads come out of the office windows and workmen stop their work. John Jensen held my horse while I went into a store. On returning there were people of all descriptions standing around looking, first at the horse and then at the saddle. Some of the funniest questions you ever heard of were asked. For instance, one man about forty years old wanted to know if the horse was trained to prance around. Imagine it! The horse had only been ridden three times. The men standing around took us into a nearby soda fountain and bought us drinks. They treat us now like we were the "Royal Family" instead of "good old Wyoming."*

*There is no Wyoming Regiment now. It is all split up into artillery and ammunition trains. We feel quite proud of the fact that a remark came from Washington that the Wyoming men were the biggest, strongest and most reliable men in the United States. Of course, we all hated to see the Wyoming regiment broken up just because it was Wyoming.*

### **JAMES CREWE REYNOLDS – WNG/116<sup>th</sup> Engineers**

Born in Parkman, Wyoming, in 1896, James Reynolds grew up in Sheridan. He was the son of banker Peter Paul Reynolds and his wife, Clara E. Crew. Known to his friends as “Jimmy,” Reynolds graduated from Sheridan high School and the University of Washington. He attained the rank of sergeant while serving with the 116th Engineers in France. His letters, published in *The Sheridan Post*, “tell of many things that the severe censorship of former days prevented from being written.” After the war, Reynolds returned to Sheridan where married Doris Elaine Kooi (in 1923) and operated the D & D Hardware Company on Main Street. The following description of his ocean voyage to France in June 1918 is from a letter written in November 1918.



*Dear Old Dad - The censorship ban has been raised for the purpose of writing to one's dad and telling all that has happened since leaving the States. It will be rather long letter, dad, so don't get tired before you have finished reading it. ...*

*At 3:00 o'clock in the morning of June 13th we shouldered our packs and made a five mile hike to what is called Alpine Landing [near Camp Merritt, New Jersey] where we got a ferry boat, which carried us to the dock where our transport was waiting.*

*The boat was an Italian vessel called the Dante Algherie (known to us as the Good Ship Wop). At 10:00 p.m. we dropped down into the bay and at 1:45 we fell in line and sailed out of the harbor and for France. Land disappeared at about 5:30, and I have not seen anything but French soil since. On the boat we had life-boat drill daily at 11:00 a.m. and rifle inspection at 3:00 p.m. The remainder of the time was our own. We laid around on the decks and hatches talking, smoking, and watching the passing scenery, which was very interesting. It consisted of water ahead, water behind, water on both sides.*

*On the second day out, we sighted a submarine, but the chaser we had scared it off, and we weren't bothered. The same day we saw a school of porpoises and some flying fish, which became a common occurrence, however, before we landed in France. Time surely did drag on*

*one's hands on the boat. Absolutely nothing to do or even think about. We saw some whales and sharks and a number of other fish which were queer looking specimens.*

*The usual routine of boat drill and inspection was kept up. Each company went on guard every fourth day. But it only hit me once, so I didn't mind that at all. On the seventh day out, two German submarines were sighted very close to the convoy and were fired upon. We had some very exciting time for about half an hour. Those old guns booming out across the water and the water spouts where the shells struck. We were on the opposite side of the convoy from the U-boats and didn't get in on any of the shooting. However, it was officially reported that the ships that did get into action "got" one of the subs and scared the other off.*

*On the night of the 26th of June, we were very near land, but had to sheer off and make a big circle because of a sub. It seems that they got wind of our approach and was waiting for us, so we sailed back out to sea, thus making the trip one day longer. The Bay of Biscay was surely rough, and many of the boys who hadn't yet gotten seasick went under. However, I came through without even feeling bad.*

*We sighted land the morning of the 27th, and there was a mighty cheer raised. The bay we sailed into was sure pretty. The green sides of the hills and the farm houses looked good after fifteen days of sea. We laid on the ship all day and night. The next morning we stepped off the Good Ship Wop onto a ferry which carried us to the pier. From there, we hiked about five miles to the old Napoleon barracks. We laid around there for a week, spending the Fourth of July in the city. It was the town of Brest. Some town. Give me America.*

### **RENE BENJAMIN FARQUET – Wyoming National Guard**

Born in Switzerland in 1897, Rene Farquet was twelve years old when he immigrated to the United States in 1909. First settling in Weston County, Wyoming, the Farquets were a farming family. Before his enlistment in the Wyoming National Guard in 1914, Rene worked at the Jackson Stationery Company in Sheridan. Reenlisting in July 1918, First Sergeant Farquet served on the Mexican border before being sent overseas, where he fought in the battles of Champagne-Marne, Aisne-Marne, Meuse-Argonne and Oise-Aisne. After the war, Farquet returned to Sheridan. In 1925, he moved to Portland, Oregon, where he managed a stationery store. He later became a printer in Santa Barbara, California, where he died in 1988. Farquet's single letter home, published in *The Sheridan Post* in August 1918, tells of his time at artillery school in Saumur, France. He also describes the sinking of the steamship *Tuscania* in February 1918.



*I am sorry for not having written sooner in answer to your letter, but postponed doing so while I was in the battery because our officers were so strict in censoring our mail that almost everything of interest was deleted. Now that I am not connected with a regiment, I will have the opportunity to tell you more about where we are and what we are doing. I left the battery about a month ago and came to Saumur, France to take a course in artillery. This is some place - you have probably heard something of it as it was formerly the great French cavalry schools. Previous to the war, it was one of the most prominent schools in the world, and officers from many countries came here to take instruction in riding. The French have now turned the school over to the Americans as an artillery school, and it is considered the best one we have.*

*Our instructors are all experienced - men who have seen action - together with a great many French officers who have been in this line since the beginning of the war.*

*So far as equipment is concerned, we have everything just as it is at the front, and we are supposed to use it as if we were in the front line trenches.*

*We receive instruction in telephony, telegraphy, wireless and riding. There are a number of large riding halls where we hurdle and practice different stunts in riding. I am proud to say that I have had equitation in the Saumur cavalry school. The city is noted for its monuments, walks and drives. As soon as I can procure a pamphlet telling something of historical interest concerning Saumur, I will send one to you. I was sorry not to write more in regard to the trip overseas, but my first attempt in that direction was so completely censored that very little was left when it reached the states.*

*I had the opportunity of meeting [American journalist] Irvin Cobb, who arrived on our transport. He came into our dining hall several times and talked to us about his first trip to Europe which was made during the first year of the war. He sure is good - the best I ever heard. I laughed for a week afterwards at his comical way of putting things. His story [about the Tuscania] in the Saturday Evening Post was told exactly as it happened. I was on deck at the time and saw the whole thing. The Tuscania was not more than five hundred yards and to the right and to the rear of us all day. We could see the soldiers on deck and signaled to them during the day, finding out where they were from and other things of interest. All at once, I heard an awful shock and what was it but the boat nearest us, going down. It sure woke up a few of us and, believe me, I slept with my clothes on and my life-saver close at hand. We minded it less than we might, since we were so near land. The next morning we were in England and tickled to death to put our feet on land.*

## HARVEY ELLSWORTH LONABAUGH – WNG/148<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery



By the time America joined the war in April 1917, Harvey Lonabaugh was already a seasoned soldier. A member of the Wyoming National Guard since 1908, he had already served on the Mexican Border, fighting the forces of Pancho Villa in 1916 and 1917. After the Guard was nationalized into the 148th Field Artillery, Harvey - now Major Lonabaugh - was sent straight to France. Born in Wyoming in 1891, Harvey was a graduate of Sheridan High school, the Culver Military Academy, and the University of Nebraska. Like his father, Ellsworth Eugene Lonabaugh, Harvey went to work as a lawyer. Following his discharge, Harvey returned to Sheridan, resumed his law career, and was elected county attorney in 1920. Still active in the Army Reserve Corps, Harvey represented Wyoming at the Army War College at Washington D.C., in 1923. Sadly, utilizing his service pistol, he took his own life in January 1924, in his Manhattan (New York) hotel suite. He is buried in Sheridan. The following letter was printed in *The Sheridan Daily Enterprise* in May 1918.

*I have not heard from you for some time, but as I have been traveling all over France in the last month, it is no wonder.*

*I have been ordered to the front and am up there now awaiting assignment. I do not know the new unit to which I am assigned, so cannot give my new address. I doubt if you will hear from me very often now as we are very busy here, especially while the Boches [a derogatory term for a German soldiers] are putting on the big show with the British.*

*I am away from all of the old gang now, and know no one up here.*

*The scene up here is entirely different from my old station. Here you see war and action on every side. I heard my first guns yesterday. Gas seems to be the most dangerous thing they have to cope with, outside of their heavy attacks. I have not received my gas masks yet, but will get some soon, I expect.*

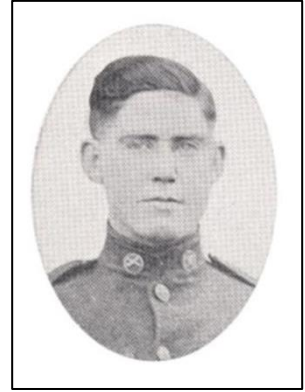
*It is very rainy and muddy now and not at all the kind of day one would choose for a walk or ride.*

From *The Sheridan Daily Enterprise*: "In a postscript, the writer adds that he has just received his orders to go to the front and that all of his officers think him lucky."



## THOMAS THORNTON COTTON – Wyoming National Guard

When Sheridan resident Thomas Cotton arrived in France in February 1918, he told his mother, “From all I can hear, I will never get any closer than ten miles from the front line trenches. Wish I was where I could get up a little closer. We boys are safe at least for two or three months, and we will not be in much danger then.” He soon got his wish, for Private First Class Cotton was a member of the 148th Field Artillery, the group of Wyoming soldiers who saw action at some of the biggest battles of the war. Shortly after fighting at Champagne-Marne in July 1918, the 148th turned around and immediately fought at Aisne-Marne. In this letter, published in *The Sheridan Daily Enterprise* on 30 August 1918, Cotton “tells of the hardships of the war and the great suffering that our brave boys are undergoing to defeat the Hun.”



*Dear Mother - As I have nothing to do this afternoon, I'm devoting my time to writing letters, for God only knows when I will get the chance again, as I expect to move from here tonight as we have driven the enemy so far that our guns cannot reach any more. I can sit and look from the shell-torn window and see a line of soldiers that if I could see the length of it, I know it is miles long.*

*My dear, we came over here to win the war, and it's not going to take us years to do it. I have seen some awful sad sights during my short time off the front, and my heart aches for the poor people who have lost their sons and sweethearts here. One boy I found had his little testament in his hand, showing he had passed his last few minutes with his God, and another with the picture of his sweetheart in one hand and a letter from his mother in the other. They sure must have died like men.*

*I and the chaplain and a couple other boys laid them away as best we could until they can be taken up and sent to their homes. I tell you, it was hard to bury them as we did, and it brought many sad thoughts, but we had to do our work and do it quick.*

*You would not know the boys here. They look on these things now as things in everyday life, but if one could only tell what was going on inside the world would hardly believe it.*

*One of our boys went out from camp and he had not gone a hundred yards when he found his brother dead in a shell hole. It struck him pretty hard, coming over here, looking for a trace of him every day, to find him thus. And again a fellow can pass house after house and villages which are literally pounded to the earth. I tell you, it is something to cause us to fight our very best.*

*When the Germans started their big offensive on July 14 [at Champagne-Marne], they had to cross a river of fair size, and in a short time it was a river of running blood. That is the night we fought so desperately and the Americans changed [it] into an Allied drive. Our infantrymen are the real fighters of this war. The artillery is supposed to be a higher branch of the service, but I will scoop up dirt with my hat to an infantryman any old day.*

### **CLYDE E. KELSEY – WNG/148<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery**

Born in Sheridan County, Wyoming, in June of 1898, Clyde Kelsey lived in both Sheridan and Arvada. He enlisted with the Wyoming National Guard (148th Field Artillery) in June 1916, just after his high school graduation. In January 1918, Kelsey transferred to the 146th Field Artillery, Battery C. Just like the 148th, Battery C found itself on the front lines in most of the war's biggest American battles: Champagne-Marne, Aisne-Marne, St. Mihiel and Meuse-Argonne. In between fights, Kelsey performed with the 146th Field Artillery Players - a group of musicians that entertained nearby troops. In October 1918, Private Kelsey was doing a little sightseeing "Somewhere in France," when he ran into a car filled with soldiers. He ... well, we'll let him tell the story:



*A few nights ago, Battery E, 148th, pulled up and camped within a couple of miles of us. I was out sightseeing in a little town below us when a car went by full of soldiers. I heard some say, "Hello, Clyde!" I turned around, of course, to see who it was and the car turned around and came back. Talk about surprises. I was sure the one when old "Fat" Adams and four or five boys came up and shook hands. It was the first time I had seen any of them since I left them in January last. Nothing would do, but I must get in and take a ride, and the car was loaded clear down then. That was about 3 o'clock p.m. We rode around until supper time, when they took me over to their camp for supper. Talk about eat - you should have seen me. Their mess sergeant gets out and "rustles" once in a while so they can have nice things to eat, while ours sits around all day with a big pipe in his mouth and reads - and we are out of luck.*

*Of course, I had to stay there that night, and believe me, we sure had some time. Got the old quartette together and "sang up a bit" until nearly 11 p.m., when a Hun bomber flew over our heads and started "laying eggs," as we call them, all around us, and we had to douse the lights and run for dugouts. That was about eighteen kilometers behind the lines, too. (I forgot to tell you that we are away back resting up and drawing new clothes, etc., preparatory for a long trip into a new sector.)*

*The bombing only lasted half an hour, and when it was over, we crawled back out of the dugouts, and the captain called the roll to see if anyone was killed or hurt, which there were none, and then we went to bed. Pretty soon we heard the rattle of machine guns and saw the flashes of bombs and searchlights in the air, and we knew they were after the Hun plane that did the bombing. Pretty soon one of the big French searchlights found him, and we saw four Allied airplanes make a dive for him, and then everything went pitch dark, and all the motors of the aircraft were cut off. We knew then that something would happen in a few minutes. Sure enough, there came the rattle of machine guns and a big burst of flame, and an airplane fell like a rocket to the ground. It must have been the Hun aviator, because the fighting stopped and we heard the humming of the French "spads" [biplane fighters] going in the direction of their airdrome.*

*[The next morning] we got up, dressed and went up to the kitchen, where the guard had a good fire, and some coffee, and stayed there until breakfast. For breakfast we had ham and eggs, hot cakes, doughnuts, coffee, biscuits and some good candy which Captain Nelson bought for the battery with his own money.*

*After breakfast the captain came around and said that my regiment had pulled out at midnight and that I'd have to go with him. I asked how he knew, and he said a dispatcher told him. Well, the regiment did leave at midnight all right, all but C Battery, so that I had to tell the boys "Au revoir" and go back to beans and bread. I don't know when I'll ever see them again, but here's hoping it will be soon.*

<p>In 1918, Kelsey took some time to tell more about his job with the 146<sup>th</sup>. Like many of his fellow soldiers, Kelsey was injured by mustard gas - despite his position as gas sentry.</p>
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*You say the hills ring there every time we gain a victory. Gee whiz! You must get a little bit tired of them sometimes, don't you? It has been a continued victory for us ever since we started in, but we sure earn it, believe me: the kind of life we have to live. There isn't a day or night that we aren't under German artillery fire, so to keep away from the shrapnel, etc., we have to sleep underground and talk about mud, rain and cold nights. Wow! But we have overcoats and an extra blanket now, so it isn't quite so bad. My little dugout is directly behind one of the guns, and every time it fires, rocks, dirt, etc., fall down on me till sometimes I think I'll go bug house.*

*I'll have to stop a minute I guess and go out and see an airplane fight.*

*Well! there's one more Hun fighting bug that won't do any more harm. He came over after one of our balloons, but he was clear out of luck. Our guns got him before he could turn around. Every day we see at least two or three air battles and two or three Germans hit the ground every time. Horse races, etc., will be pretty tame to us when we get back.*

*The other day we had several balloons up, and the Germans tried five times to get one and the last time they succeeded. One of them slid down out of the clouds, burned a balloon and got clear out of the country before we knew what happened. One day at our last position we saw them burn seven. But I suppose the Allies raise just as much thunder with German balloons. Just about daylight this morning we saw a big German sausage poke his nose up over a hill trying to get some observations, when bang! a little Spad plane shot down on her and all we could see was smoke. It must be some sensation to be up 2,000 or 3,000 feet and have one of those gasoline birds tear loose at you with machine guns, burn up your balloon, and then cut loose again at you in your parachute. I saw one of our observers jump five times one morning in about two hours before they got his balloon.*

*Some people seem to think that Germany has the supremacy of the air. She hasn't got the supremacy of the air. She hasn't got the supremacy of anything. I'll bet she never saw as many airplanes in her whole history as we saw sail over last evening at dusk. Several said they counted 200 and then got all mixed up. Italians, American, English and French, altogether, on a bombing trip. You see, they go over and drop bombs behind the German's trenches and at the same time our artillery puts over a fast barrage and the doughboys go over the top. Is it any wonder we drive them back? They are making considerable resistance up in this sector, though. More than we have encountered since we have been on the front. We are up pretty close to them for being big guns; up even ahead of the little French 75's, and they have direct observation on us. Consequently, they make it pretty hot in here once in a while. I've laid here several nights and wished I was back home in a good soft warm bed. Every day we can see where our shells light, and see the flash and smoke of the German guns.*

*I have a pretty good job in the battery now, that of gas sentry. But it makes one feel kind of queer when you stop to consider that the life of every man in the whole battery is in your hands 16 hours out of every 24. There is not so much danger in the day time, though, because most everyone is awake. But after night when half of the battery is asleep and the other half is at the guns, one has to be on the job every minute. Believe me, it's a long old eight hours to spend walking up and down a road in mud up to your ankles, chilled to the bone and shells dropping here and there. Then's when a fellow thinks about home, and if I ever get out of this O.K., I think little old Sheridan, Wyo., will be big enough to hold me for some time.*

*Night before last the Dutch shot gas all around us the whole night long, and alarm after alarm sounded all along the line, several batteries being pretty badly gassed. To my mind, about the most blood-curdling sound I ever heard on a still night is that confounded gas alarm. Not only the sound alone, but what it means. It means that there is deadly gas near, and every man that gets two or three good whiffs of it is a goner. I'm always afraid I'll be too late with it or not loud enough or something and some fellows will be gassed. It isn't a pleasant sensation at all. They*

*say they find dead Germans with gas masks on and blankets wrapped around their heads to keep away from the gas, but it gets them anyway. Some of the boys were up on a hill day before yesterday making a little fire and coming back ran into a small amount of German gas, but none were burned seriously. One of them has a pretty sore neck this morning is all.*

After the war, Kelsey returned to Sheridan for a brief while. He attended aviator school in 1920, but was lost to history shortly afterwards. If you know Clyde Kelsey's whereabouts after 1920, please contact us at [trailend@wyo.gov](mailto:trailend@wyo.gov).

### **ORLO EARL SMITH – Wyoming National Guard**

Orlo Smith was born in Hopwood, Pennsylvania in 1896. By the age of four, he and his parents were living in the coal-mining community of Higby, located just north of Sheridan. Unlike most of the men, his father was not a miner: he was a plasterer who worked on building homes for the mine workers. Smith enlisted prior to Registration Day (June 6, 1917); he had previously signed up with the Wyoming National Guard in 1914. By the time he went overseas in early 1918, he was ready and rarin' to go. Which was good, because his battery was quickly positioned



on the front lines. This letter home, published by *The Sheridan Daily Enterprise* in August 1918, was written "Somewhere in France" on July nineteenth. In it, Smith provides details about the fate of several of his companions from the 148th Field Artillery during what would come to be known as the Second Battle of Marne. After the war, Smith married and moved to California where he worked as a trucker until his death in 1963.

*Friday afternoon and am having a little rest; the first time we have had a chance to rest since the first day we landed here on the front. Our guns have been continuously roaring night and day for a week. We are very short on men so we drivers have had to help with ammunition. Each shell weighs 96 pounds, so you see it was very hard on me, but I try my best to hold out with the rest of the boys. I have been awfully tired and sleepy but keep right on going and would do so as long as our guns were doing some fine work. Our battery has done fine work; since we arrived we have been praised by a good many French officers for our good work, especially staying by our guns under very heavy firing.*

*During the night of July 14th and 15th, a French corporal said that it was the largest artillery duel he had ever witnessed since the beginning of the war. Boche shells landed all around us all night long and we could hear one coming over and the boys would watch to see where it would light, then they would load one in the gun and send it right back to them. We were just five*

*miles back of the line when the Germans opened up, but now we have them out of reach of our guns so we are waiting for orders to advance. There will be no retreating for the American boys!*  
...

*During the night of the big attack we had seven men gassed of which two were shell shocked and Sergeant [Grant] Barber of Sheridan was killed while observing for our guns. He was killed instantly, but was not with the battery at the time; he was about a mile back of the front line of trenches when a German shell bursted about two feet ahead of him. Corporal Purkey was with him at the time but was not killed. He is in the hospital now, but was torn up about the head pretty badly, but will pull through. They were both Sheridan boys. [Purkey later died of his wounds.]*

*Last night we had an aeroplane drop a few bombs near us but didn't do very much damage. I mean this morning about 2:30 a.m. They also shot a few machine shells at us but they didn't take any effect. We were in bed most of us at the time but the noise of his machine soon woke us up but he didn't stay very long.*

*Jay Walker was gassed. He was the only one from Sheridan that you know, but he is alright now. Tell his mother not to worry.*

*We are all fine and dandy here, no one sick. I am feeling just as good as can be and am waiting our chance to go over the top which I hope is soon as the sooner this war is over the sooner we get home, so we are waiting our chance.*

### **SEYMOUR SERENO SHARP – Wyoming National Guard**

Born in Indiana in 1893, Seymour Sharp graduated “with honors” from Sheridan High School in 1910, graduated “with high honors” from the University of Wyoming in 1914, and was Sheridan’s one and only Rhodes Scholar, heading off to Oxford University in 1915. When war broke out that year, Sharp trained for a while with the British Army before returning home to enlist in the Wyoming National Guard (148th Field Artillery). He saw action at Champagne-Marne, Aisne-Marne, St Mihiel and Meuse-Argonne and was awarded the silver star. After the war, Sharp worked as a civil engineer for the State of Wyoming, and served thirteen years as the mayor of Saratoga. He drowned in the North Platte River in 1953. This letter was written from “Somewhere in France” in August 1918, and contains a few details normally removed by censors.



*Yes, I am at the front now, and have been for some time. I couldn't tell you though when we were coming but this is not the first letter I have written since I have been within sound of the guns. I can't tell you what sector we are in, but it is a busy one, and I have lots of work to do all the time. Two or three times lately I have gone for 48 hours without sleep, but I have sure made up for it since then. However, such a long stretch doesn't happen very often.*

*We have sure been doing some good work in my battalion and have been highly complimented for it on a couple of occasions. I believe that in another month the American troops will have the Kaiser's goat - we are starting out to get it now, and he soon discovered that the road to Paris was not a paved street.*

*I have seen some very interesting sights lately and also some horrible sights I don't like to talk about. I have been in some of the territory that was occupied by the Germans a short time ago - in fact, right now I am writing this letter on a desk in a little cellar where some Germans had their headquarters. One of the German officers is buried just outside the house, or rather, what is left of the house. A little farther on down the road there are quite a number of wooden crosses marking German graves. By the way, the German officer was killed only about 24 hours before we arrived on the scene.*

*Yesterday morning I had to go up closer than usual to our lines, and I saw a number of Germans dead and a few American boys who had been killed on the battlefield, lying right where they fell until a squad come along to pick them up. I hate to see a dead American, but we are winning now, and we know it, and the Germans show that they know it too, from the way they scatter and leave piles of valuable equipment and munitions behind.*

*I have seen several little villages where not a house is left untouched by shell-fire from both sides on various dates, but the French farmers and people in general are brave and are ready to go back to their homes as soon as they are freed from German occupation. I have seen old French men and women working in the fields within three or four miles of the front lines, apparently with never a thought of the enemy.*

*I must stop talking about this stuff now before I say something I am not allowed to. I don't know whether I have gone over the limit or not already - I hope not.*

*Yes, I have a fairly important job - it is mostly surveying and map work, and men who can do that sort of work are pretty scarce around here. That's about all I can tell you about it.*

## DONALD GRATTON HARDEN – Wyoming National Guard

A 1911 graduate of Northwestern University holding a degree in pharmacy, Donald Harden was employed at Sheridan's Brown Drug when he enlisted for military service in July 1917. Instead of joining the medical corps - as might have been expected considering his pharmacological background - Harden signed up as a musician with the 148th Field Artillery (formerly the Wyoming National Guard). As a member of the headquarters company band, Harden was kept busy with his musical duties; he and his mates sometimes complained about having to play a concert every other night. But in the following undated letter, published in *The Sheridan Post* in May 1918, Harden joyfully describes the band's recent, unofficial concert tour of several small French villages. After his discharge in 1919, Harden returned to Sheridan where he worked for a number of pharmacies. He died in Sheridan in 1974.



*This has been a week of exceptional pleasure to me ... but yesterday was the best day yet. The band was given a holiday and we had the use of the big Riker truck with ample seating capacity for 29. At six o'clock in the morning, with beautiful weather, we started.*

*The roads here are far superior to our own in America, and there is a profusion of wild flowers. There is much more timber than one would imagine, mostly tall pines, with a thick, almost tropical undergrowth of ferns. There is also a sprout which grows from two to three feet high and is literally covered with bright yellow blossoms. These form a striking contrast with the brown and rich maroon of last year's fern leaves and the green of this season.*

*Early in the forenoon we passed through several small hamlets, but about 9 o'clock came to a larger town and gave a concert in the public square. School was dismissed by the mayor so that the kids could be there, and we were soon decorated with bouquets. After the concert the mayor gave us an invitation to a place where numerous and sundry toasts were drunk.*

*Later we went to another town, much larger, where we had a genuine French dinner. Evidently the people there had seen few Americans and were at first inclined to avoid us, but when about 1:30 we got our instruments and proceeded to the square for a concert, they flocked in from all directions. School was dismissed there also, and even a mill at the edge of town was stopped so that the girls employed there could come. We were simply overwhelmed with flowers there, and many of the little tots even wanted to kiss us. After the concert, which concluded with the French national anthem, and our own by request, the high clergyman of the village invited us to his own parlor - a magnificent place where in his long black robe he officiated at a genuine champagne banquet, served by the belles of the town.*



*At the conclusion of that affair, we adjourned to another place where the mayor of the town was host. Many good toasts were responded to, and by the time we were loaded (in the truck, I mean) for the return trip, we were unanimously of the opinion that our picnic had been a grand success.*

### **CARL W. ADAMS – Wyoming National Guard**

Born somewhere in northeast Wyoming in 1898 (his father was a miner, so he may have been born at or near the Cambria mines in Weston County), Carl Adams moved to Sheridan as a young boy. He attended Sheridan High School before joining the Wyoming National Guard in 1916. After the war, Adams moved back home, lived with his mother and went to work for the railroad. He married in 1924, but was divorced by 1940, at which time he was managing a cafe in Murray, Utah, and living again with his mother. He died in Seattle, Washington, in 1958.



One letter home to his mother, dated August 16, 1918 and printed in *The Sheridan Daily Enterprise* nearly two months later, was full of the kind of light-hearted nonsense calculated to make a mother feel less worried about her boy stationed on the front “Somewhere in France.”

*Dear Mama - You speak about having lots of rain. Well, let me tell you that you do not know what a shower is, even. The trouble is you have never been introduced to any rain. We have rain, real rain, over here, and every time it rains, I take a shower bath, and when it quits, I shake myself like a dog and turn my sox inside out and go out and tell the boys I had a bath and a change of clothes. ... Our rain over here looks the same as there when it comes down, but as soon as it lands, it looks like coffee.*

*I had an umbrella for a couple of days, but the sergeant told me to get rid of it, as it looked like a signal to Boche [German] planes, and that they might drop a bomb, and then I would have to find a blacksmith shop to get my hat remodeled and reblocked.*

*I am issued one gas mask, which makes me look like a dog with goggles on eating a rubber hose, and my tin hat looks like a non-spillable wash basin with a strap to hang it by. Hat sure is handy to cook spuds in and also to bathe in, if you don't put your feet on the side, as it has a tendency to slip up and crack you on the shins when you are not expecting it to. ...*

*I think I will visit up around Berlin this fall and winter if Fritz does not get scared and quit before we get started good. I am so doggone busy that I do not get a chance to get homesick, except whenever I get asleep, as my head is always figuring out some way of ending this war this*

winter, as I have a date in Sheridan the Fourth of July 1919, to take a girl out to a picnic and then to a dance. ...

We have had several battles. One lasted about twelve hours. I will tell you a little about it. One night about midnight, when two-thirds of Battery E were resting from the day's labor, a noise came out of the night. It sounded like this: "Ssssssss-boom-blowy." And a little six or nine-inch high-explosive shell hit the earth about 100 yards from my tent, and believe me, it sure took a mouth-full. It made a hole about six or seven feet deep and about fifteen feet across.

Well, the Fritzie boys keep sending their cards over about every minute and a half for about twelve hours. Sometimes he would make a mistake and slip us a little gas, which did no damage except send a few to the hospital to rest up, and they were not hurt at all, except the gas makes your stomach stand on its head.

Next forenoon we found where Fritz had his implements of warfare stored, and we took a couple of shots at him, and another [German] implement outfit went bankrupt. And then we popped away at a couple more big outfits, and about 3 p.m. we went to bed and slept till morning; then we got up, ate breakfast, and went back to bed till dinner time. ...

I am as happy and well as ever, only too fat by about thirty or forty pounds. I walked about ten miles for this paper and got eight sheets, so I will have to quit writing so much nonsense. Whenever I get some more paper, I will tell you about the other battle we had, and we always came out victorious. Our planes drop messages over the Germans and tell them that E. Battery, 148th F. A. is on that front. Then the Germans start double-time toward Berlin.

### **ALGER WELLMAN LONABAUGH – Wyoming National Guard**

The son of one well-known Sheridan attorney (Ellsworth Eugene Lonabaugh) and the brother of another (Harvey Ellsworth Lonabaugh), Alger Wellman Lonabaugh graduated from Sheridan High School and went on to pursue a law degree of his own. Before he could complete his studies, America entered the war and everything changed. In June 1917, Alger signed up with the Wyoming National Guard. He soon transferred to the 4th Trench Mortar Battery where he quickly attained the rank of 1st Lieutenant. In a letter dated September 14 and printed in *The Sheridan Daily Enterprise* on October 12, Lonabaugh gives an unusually detailed account of a unnamed battle in which the 4th Trench Mortar Battery played a significant role. In a second letter, he tells of another artillery attack.



Sent from Verdun, France, September 1918

*Dear Dad - Well, yours truly has survived another offensive, but several times I wasn't quite sure whether I was all there or not. I know you will be interested, so will write you how it happened.*

*We left the rest camp ten days ago and traveled by night through rain, mostly on open trucks, and camped in the timber during the day. From the morning of the 9th to the night of the 13th, I was on the go most of the time. I got little food, little sleep, and didn't wash during that time.*

*The afternoon of the 8th, the captain sent three lieutenants up to make a reconnaissance of our position. We went up as far as possible in a truck and then walked the rest of the way along a road which the Boche could see, but never a shot from them. We found an old French emplacement which was fine. We returned late at night and learned we had to go into position the next night.*

*Traveled all that night, arriving about 3 a.m. at a small town in rear of the position. Had few hours' sleep and woke up to learn that a French battery had taken part of our position and that another reconnaissance would have to be made. The captain and I went on ahead, leaving orders for the battery to move on up. The guns were all in place by 6 a.m., but we had no ammunition. In the meantime, the Boches were waking up a little, but had no idea of what was coming.*

*There was a small narrow gauge railroad that ran by our position. We had secured five small wagonettes which the men pushed. The rations and everything we got came by these wagonettes. We worked all day getting the positions fixed up. The rations came about 11 o'clock the night of the 10th with orders that I return with half of the battery to get a good sleep, as there were no blankets and not enough bunks for all in the shelters. In the meantime, the Boches were getting nervous as the devil. About every 15 minutes, he would throw over a dozen shells into the crossroads where everything was coming down.*

*When we got to the crossroads, he evidently heard us, as he threw about twenty shells in there. The first three were quite short, about a hundred yards or so, but I cannot say how close the rest of them were, except that none hit closer than ten yards from me. Up the road a short distance they killed a field battery lieutenant and his striker. I think I went flat in the mud of the road about five times.*

*... There certainly was confusion on that road - Frenchmen yelling, Americans swearing, and in the melee a French ammunition train got across the track, so we had to abandon our wagonettes til morning. Got back to camp at 5 p.m. and got a few hours' sleep.*

*... When I awoke, the captain and I figured the firing data. ... We discovered some of our ammunition and made arrangements to get it up that night. Just got asleep when the commander of the French battery in whose dugout I was, came in with the message that the zero hour was one o'clock. As we had expected it at five, we had a lot of work to do. Later we received a message fixing the hour for artillery at 5:30. However, no one wanted to sleep.*

*About 1:05 she started and, believe me, she was sure some proposition. I had charge of our mortars, and we opened up at 5:30 promptly. We sure did drop them over. I went over afterwards and saw two direct hits on machine gun nests and one on a minie-werfer emplacement. We stopped firing at 8:25, and the doughboys went over the top at 8:30. ... There were just a few of them who walked over to the Boche trenches, but none of them seemed to fall. Ten minutes later the prisoners began to arrive.*

*The barrage sure was fierce. If you can imagine a machine gun firing point blank at a bank, that is just the way the big shells were dropping into the German positions.*

*The closest call I had was about nine o'clock. I was standing at the entrance to the kitchen when a Boche shell hit about a yard and a half from me in the mud. I went flat, of course, and got up shaking the mud off, looking to see who had been injured. All it did was to blow the chimney off the kitchen stove.*

#### One Month Later, October 1918

*Dear Dad - I have been in this drive since it started and am still going strong. ... I have really been seeing some of the hardships of war. I slept on top of the famous Hill 304 the first night with two blankets that I swiped from a pile of doughboys' packs. Had a whiz-bang light fifteen feet from me about a week ago, and all it did was to clout me on the shoulder with a brick. However, I had shell shock all that afternoon and jumped about a mile when a mule brayed "hee-haw."*

*Was in an attack with an infantry brigade about a week ago and had a hell of a time - men blown all to hell on three sides of me.*

*It looks as if the war would soon be over. I hope so, because I'm frank to admit I've had all I want.*

## GEORGE NICHOLAS OSTROM – Wyoming National Guard

George Ostrom was born in Spencer, Iowa, in 1888. We're not exactly sure when he moved to Sheridan, but he enlisted in the Wyoming National Guard in April 1914. After war was declared, Ostrom reenlisted in the guard, which was nationalized into the 148th Field Artillery. He served as a Sergeant First Class with the 148th and saw some of the heaviest fighting of the war. He fought at Champagne-Marne, Aisne-Marne, St. Mihiel and Meuse-Argonne (where he was gassed twice). After the war, Ostrom returned to Sheridan County, living in the rural communities of Springwillow and Clearmont. He died in Sheridan in 1982. A prolific artist, Ostrom is perhaps best known for the Bucking Bronc logo he designed for the 148th Field Artillery, and which now stands for everything "Wyoming." You see it today on everything from Wyoming license plates to University of Wyoming football helmets.



16 July 1918; published in *The Sheridan Post*, 18 October 1918

*We have been battling every day and night to keep the Huns back and it takes a lot of work. Last night it rained the night through, thunder roared, lightning flashed and the cannon boomed. This morning the country is a sea of mud. During the night we had a part of our position heavily shelled - big ones. I was on observation and near where I was stationed on an area of about ten acres there were fully fifty big shell holes, so you can imagine George did something else besides dream.*

*The guns are popping and roaring while I write. ... Slim McGovern's face is highlighted by the flash of the guns. When he pulls the trigger he leans away over and the wrinkles and whiskers on his face make a fine picture. He calls it shooting caps. This morning after he came off his relief of snapping them he came down the trail all plastered with mud, hat on the back of his head, singing "Cheer Up Lizzie." Then with his ears full of cotton so he could sleep he was ready for his blankets under a convenient gooseberry bush. ...*

*Yes, I knew Spuds [Roy H. Eaton] had been killed. Just another wooden cross in the wheat field of France. It sounds brave and it is. Everybody has been on this roundup. Last night we buried poor Sergeant Barber. Like the rest of the boys he was facing the Huns when the big drive broke.*

*I got a little tear gas last night and my eyes are still watering as I write. We have been busy driving "death beans" at Fritz. Such endurance as the boys show here would not be possible in civil life. ...*

*Girls? We saw one this morning. Also had an air raid, but the girl got the most attention.*

*You say the best of Sheridan is here. You ought to see them in overalls beside these big tubes of steel, slinging devils towards the Boches. Wesley Dale stayed with his gun when the exploding German shells threw dirt 300 feet in the air all around him. As a matter of fact we all stayed.*

July 26; published in *The Sheridan Post*, 18 October 1918

*We are on the field of action again. While I am writing there is an air battle going on and it is some sight to see an air plane fall and the sky full of bombs.*

*I am now the owner of a machine gun that is all my own. When I found it there were two dead soldiers with it. Later when I got the gun I "found" four more. You people do not know what war really is. ...*

*It is getting late and I have to rustle a place to sleep a little if things are favorable. I can stand a thousand cannon reports but a shell coming makes a noise that is apt to make one nervous. It sounds just like a siren fire whistle and then explodes. It beats business how hell keeps up.*

Undated; published in *The Sheridan Post*, 20 September 1918

*Things are the most peaceful tonight that it has been for a month. But day before yesterday it was shells. We carried poor Slim McGovern out with a shattered leg. ... We move up very often and it's lots of work; these shells are so heavy. ... "No Man's Land Today Is Our Position Tomorrow" - that's our motto. Just so they won't stop us Americans.*

*Tell everyone to be proud they are Americans. When these A. E. F.'s come back they had better be. I was on the road yesterday talking to a tall, lank Alabamian, when an aeroplane come over and started to bomb some ambulances carrying wounded. He took off his hat, scratched his long shaggy hair and said, "Thar's two beings in the world I want; one is one of them men that flies and the other is one of them men that holds up his hands and hollers 'kamerad' and works a machine gun with his foot. I'd sure work both feet and hands on them."*

Undated; published in *The Sheridan Post*, 20 September 1918

*Writing is good tonight so here goes. I've a real table to write on, a candle, etc. There is not much news only war - war - war - and it's the worst word ever made of three letters. ... I have been a little off the last few days, everything is so foul around here. A million for some Wyoming water and air. You folks don't realize we are pushing the Boche to hell now and are where the big stuff is coming off. ... Every time I write a couple lines a gun goes off and about wrecks the delicate things on the table.*

15 October 1918; published in *The Sheridan Enterprise*, 9 November 1918

*I'm still trying to do my bit although very much worn out and not much left. The weather is also bad. It rains every day; cold and foggy all the time. French mud is the worst in the world.*

*Things that were exciting are not noticeable now; we never have been relieved from the front.*

*The country here was very well timbered, but it's barren now - just stumps and a few piles of rock where village have been. They can't work the fields unless they level them off. It's all shell holes, mines and barb wire. People that never seen it don't know what war is - they can't be told. France knows, and I hope they don't stop till Germany proper is mashed up a little.*

7 November 1918; published in *The Sheridan Post*, 3 December 1918

*It is cold here and rains nearly all the time. It reminds me of when we have those fall rains at home and when it clears up, the mountains have their first coating of snow. I am in an A. R. C. [Red Cross camp] beside a stove toasting my shins. I am drowsing, half asleep and too comfortable to take a real nap. Of course, my mind goes back to those days when I could go riding down the divide with the good old Wyoming air fluttering my open shirt and see the world's hump of lavender [the Bighorn Mountains] capped with a brassy white frosting.*

*We have had lots of experience since the gang of us in civilian clothes marched down Main Street and proclaimed ourselves "Sheridan's Own." ... On that day long ago we were mighty brave, but since that we have passed through three stages - brave, scared and don't care, the last being the most successful. During the brave stage we were often led to take unnecessary chances when somebody was looking; being scared showed good sense and induced us to keep our heads down when there was no occasion for looking out; but now the boys are hardened and don't care, and this is the feeling that comes naturally to the gambler whether the stakes are money or your own life.*

*The boys gave an A. E. F. cheer last night when they heard the good news from the front and learned the way the war lords are dropping out. They are saying, Hell, Heaven, or Hoboken by Christmas. For my part, all I ask is to get my feet under mother's table with plenty of turkey and cranberries in front of me. That will be about all the heaven I will ask for.*

*You will get this about Christmas, so I am wishing you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.*

## JOSEPH MAURICE MEYER – Wyoming National Guard

By the time war was declared in 1917, twenty-four year old Joseph Meyer of Sheridan had already been in the service for four years. Meyer was commissioned as a second lieutenant when the Guard was nationalized into the 148th Field Artillery. Working as a freight clerk for the Chicago Burlington & Quincy Railroad provided Meyer with the perfect background for his work with the supply section of the army, which he did after getting mildly gassed. In the summer of 1918, Meyer lived with a civilian family near the front lines. In his letters to his mother, he describes life at home with the family (he could not provide the location due to being in an “advance station”). After the war, Meyer returned to Sheridan and worked as administrator for the Works Project Administration.



### August 10, 1918

*As I have nothing to do until after dinner and not so very much then, I will write you while I have the time. Things are rather quiet now for a few days, but am expecting them to pick up soon.*

*My work in the Burlington office has helped me out the last couple of months in regard to the claims I handle once in a while. You see the government has to pay the French for everything they use. When the soldiers are living in houses we have to pay for the usage; we even have to pay for the use of the trenches. What do you think of that?*

*I am enclosing a little picture of a baby which its mother wanted me to send you. I am living at their house now. They are mighty fine people. They have a son and we have fun together once in a while. They all send you their love and “best thoughts.” They think I’m pretty good. But I tell them they don’t know me like I know myself.*

### August 18, 1918

*Now I want to tell you what I had for dinner yesterday within sound of the cannon. It was a special occasion. I was invited by the people where I am now staying - and they think I’m “some punkins.” The mother is about your age, mom, and she sure is a dear soul! Her husband is a dandy man, too. He is a school teacher here. They have two daughters, both have been married; and one son my age who is a sergeant in the aviation. The husband of one of the daughters, a captain, was killed in the battle of the Somme in 1916, leaving a sweet little girl now six years old.*

*Well! here’s the dinner: A swell fish, vegetable salad; potatoes, beans and peas from the garden; sauce, nice bread and butter, a little gravy (you know how I like a lot); some dandy*



*baked young chicken with French trimmin's and all. I can't name the dessert. But it sure was a "cookoo" - a sort of an egg and milk custard affair with floating icing on top, served with some nice light cake and fruit. What do you think of that for a Sunday dinner within hearing of the roar of the guns and the dropping of bombs? I say, it's one to be remembered! And last, but not least, but most common - was the champagne which here takes the place of water, you know. But you know my limitations in that regard; and am always informing them that my mother and my people in America were brought up on water. They think it a most idiotic thing that I like water and milk. They even consider it barbarous to drink milk unless it is warmed and has sugar in it. Oh! what a funny old world this is.*

### **OSBORNE DAVID TEAGUE – Wyoming National Guard**

Born in California, Missouri, in 1892, Osborne Teague was working as a cowboy on the L. L. Zingg ranch near Clearmont when he joined the Wyoming National Guard in August 1917. Whether he had acquired the needed skills before or after he joined, he was soon assigned the job of company cook. While overseas, Teague cooked - and fought - at the biggest American battles of the war. After he was honorably discharged at Fort D. A. Russell in June 1919, Teague returned to Sheridan County. He worked as a drayman in Clearmont for a while before moving to Big Horn. After he died in April 1972, Teague was buried at the Custer Battlefield National Cemetery. Teague's letters home were published in *The Sheridan Daily Enterprise*.



Sent from "Somewhere in France" in July 1918

*My dearest Mother - They say we are allowed to tell you that we are on the "front," so will say we are. But there is not much more excitement here than there was in the south. Everybody is farming and going on just the same as if there were no war. They have some mighty nice crops around here. It's a regular farming county.*

*Most of us are disappointed because there isn't any more excitement than there is. But expect we will find more before it's over with. But so far we are in about as much danger as we would be at home in a church with the doors locked. But this is a queer old war. Can't figure it out. Guess it will all come out in the wash, though.*

*Am cooking for eighty men now. We haven't much of a variety, but we have plenty of what we have. Had roast beef and brown gravy, new spuds and pudding for dinner. It's baked beans, peaches, bread, butter and coffee for supper. But when you think it isn't a job, you're sure*

*mistaken. It might be easy for anyone that didn't care whether he got it done or not, or how he did it. But I can't see it that way. And if it isn't done right, I'm the responsible man. Have been working every day from 4:30 in the morning until 9 or 9:30 at night. I love the work that way, long as everything goes right, but it keeps me from thinking of home so much. But when you start in to fry beefsteak for a bunch like this and have just time enough to get them out and have it start in pouring down rain with your stove out in the middle of the road, it sure gets on your nerves. But I've never fallen down so far and have quite a "rep" as a cook in this army. One of the boys said last night, "the stew that made the First battalion famous." And if you could smell those beans, you would sure come over and take supper with us!*

*Tell everybody that the old 148th F. A. is handing the Dutch all that our old big guns can put over, and every shell has our address on it. Please don't worry about me, for I'm feeling fine and dandy, and wouldn't be anywhere else now if I could, for I have waited nearly a year now for the chance we have got and what I mean is, we are sure going to see Berlin before we get home.*

Sent from Hoehr, Germany, in April 1919

*Talk about a wicked bunch of gravy. I sure handed the officers one tonight. You see, I made doughnuts this afternoon and had about a half dipper of milk left. When I went to make gravy for supper, thinks I, here's where I use the rest of my milk. Very good judgment, was it not? No - I had put vanilla extract in the milk and forgot about it until I tackled it myself! One lieutenant said he was putting it in three times a day. The whole bunch joshed me about it. Guess I'll hear about it all the way round by tomorrow night.*

*I outrank all the "non-coms." The old army cooks just about have their own way when it comes to a showdown, for if anyone makes him sore, he has sure got a comeback on him. For, if anything makes a soldier mad, just scorch the chow or weaken the coffee. Or feed him on salmon and hard tack for a few weeks. Of course, we get lots of cussings, but all to our backs. But when they meet you face to face, they are all smiles, especially if they want a little piece of butter or some bread to take home with them for a lunch before bed time.*

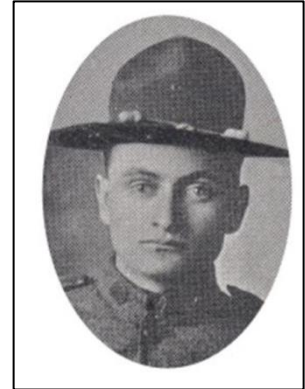
*The officers come in late some mornings and go in the dining room and ask the waiters if Teague's in a good humor or not. And if they could bum me for a cup of coffee. But I've been around the officers most of the time since I got to Cheyenne and have never had a bit of trouble with any of them. Old Major Nickerson told the boys once that as much trouble as I used to have with the "Wild Cat Kitchen," he never saw me mad a single time, but he bet if ever I did cut loose, it would be like the opening of a big drive.*

*Well, some way, the harder the work was, the better I liked it. Sometimes I'd think I couldn't hit it up for another hour to save my life, then I'd get busy at something and first thing I knew the*

*hour had slipped by and I was still going. That's about all the news except I dropped a can of butter on my toe this morning.*

### **WESLEY EMERSON DALE – Wyoming National Guard**

Dayton resident Wesley Dale enlisted in the Wyoming National Guard in 1914. He reenlisted in 1916 and 1917, and served as a Private 1st Class with Headquarters Company. Like other guard members, he was brought into the regular army when the guard was nationalized for overseas service. After the armistice was signed in November 1918, the 148th began what Dale called "The Watch on the Rhine." After the war, Dale worked as a bookkeeper in Sheridan for a while before moving to Los Angeles, where he found employment as an accountant. He married, raised a family, and died in California in 1972. In a letter to his brother, published in *The Sheridan Daily Enterprise* on February 13, 1919, he describes his post-war travels.



*Dear Brother - Well, we are doing the watch on the Rhine at last. This is our stopping place until we start home, I guess.*

*We are located in the above named town [Weissenthurm] which is right on the bank of the Rhine about fifteen kilometers down the river from Coblenz. This is a pretty nice little town of I guess about ten or fifteen thousand population, and we are billeted all over town, right in the houses, and have it pretty nice.*

*Got a room with another fellow that has two real beds and a writing table in it, which is a real treat for soldiers that have been on the front sleeping most anywhere.*

*When the armistice was signed, we moved back off of the Argonne Forest front to the little town of Blercourt and from there we came up through Luxemburg, staying overnight in Esch, which is a very nice modern little town of about thirty-five or forty thousand people. The people talk German mostly, but quite a little French is also spoken, and I saw several that could speak English. They do not like the way the Germans treated them at all and have "beaucoup" French, American and allied flags on every building.*

*We also went through Luxemburg City, the capital. It is located in a steep valley and has some of the most beautiful scenery I have ever seen. Old castles and stone bridges, etc., and the country is covered with evergreen forests that have been planted. Fine roads, too, but not so wide or good as those of France.*

*We stopped at Wasserbillig, just inside the Luxemburg border for quite a little while before coming on up. Just a small place on the banks of the Moselle River, thence to Bitburg, Budesheim, Obr Ehe, Mayen and this town. I stayed overnight in Mayen. It is quite a place, too. The people seem to be quite friendly; of course, it is a groundhog case and pays them to be, I guess. They are short on food, but not starving by a whole lot and don't seem to have suffered very much during the war. They say, however, that if they had as much to eat as we have, they could have fought a long time yet.*

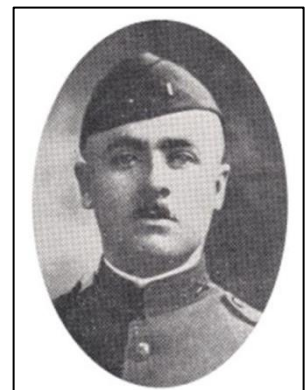
*The Rhine is a pretty large river. It must be about four hundred yards across it here and deep enough for pretty large steamers to run on it and very swift. Almost as swift as the Big Horn at Thermopolis. It gets slower and wider further down and has old castles and ruins all along both banks on the hills. The country that I have seen is hilly and rough and has lots of forest, both hardwood and pine.*

*We were near Metz when the fighting ended, and I think we would have taken it in a little while. Nantillois was the nearest little town to our last position, and Mountfaucon, Malancourt, Montzeville and Verdun were in our rear. We went clear through that drive. Guess we would have moved up to Sedan next.*

*Well, I must close. Hoping this finds you well and enjoying life as I am. I remain, as ever, Wesley*

### **EDWARD EVERETT AUSTIN – Wyoming National Guard**

The son of a successful Sheridan merchant, Edward Austin was born in Nebraska in 1894. He attended Sheridan High school and, when war broke out, joined the Wyoming National Guard (later the 148th Field Artillery). Like the rest of the members of the 148th, Austin ended up staying in France for months after the war was actually over. He was part of the group that helped return the machinery and personnel of war back to the United States. Unlike most of his fellow soldiers, however, Austin didn't come home alone. In 1919, he married a nineteen year old French woman, Marie Mathilde, in Bordeaux. They traveled to America - with their young son - a few months later and settled in Buffalo where Austin operated a Ford automobile dealership. Austin's letters to home from France were printed in both *The Sheridan Post* and *The Sheridan Daily Enterprise*. His last, printed by *The Enterprise* in June 1918, is particularly telling of the state of mind of the soldier left behind to clean up the mess of war.



*A steamer has dropped her anchor in the harbor; her crew is on the streets of old Bordeaux; her cargo of mail is distributed, and we received only a few thin letters from you. We don't ask you why because we know why. We DO ask you to be a little considerate. And you in turn ask, "Who Are You?"*

*We are the remnants of that victorious American army whose assistance has made Lafayette turn over in his grave, smiling happily to have won the friendship of America. We are those whose duty is to sit day in and day out at our desks in the bureau in Bordeaux, adding, subtracting and multiplying figures, working far into the night that the paperwork of an army undergoing the problem of demobilization may be kept in condition. And you have forgotten us; well, well, well. You who threw your hat in the air and cheered us when we came over here; you who praised us for what we were doing; you who welcomed the returned heroes; is your fired patriotism dying and have you lost that old-time spirit that made us so happy to come over here and fight for you?*

*The war is over and the boys had to get home. Somebody had to stay and see it through. There was the problem of transportation; getting the troops as well as the equipment home; haste meant waste and waste meant more money out of your already severely strained bank account. Things are going smoothly and very soon we will all be home. Meanwhile, America wonders why we stay.*

*We are subjected to charges of immorality, unfaithfulness, misconduct and other like things. Those charges are made by the degenerate minds of a class of critics and writers who needed the money and designed and preyed upon us. And the public accepts the statements as truth.*

*It is summer. The hot summer sun of Southern France beats down on our woolens, and the perspiration streams down our bodies. We sleep four to a bunk and eat whatever is handed us. We have no complaint to register. It is a he-man's war. While we have been gone, we've lost our girls, our jobs and many other things we needed. We are lonesome, homesick and ready to go home. But what do you care about that?*

*Bordeaux, France's immediate representative, has done her all for our comfort; she has exerted herself and we have appreciated her. Her daughters have entertained us and her daughter's mothers have done their best to fill our craving stomachs with mother's best cooking. But they are not our own and we can't appreciate them; their very attention only reminds us of what we are missing at home. Put yourself in our places; we sit here at our desks, a hot wind blows through the open window; its burning force is laden with the repugnant odor of the garlic; our desks are crowded with paperwork; we listen to the mournful notes of an outgoing steamer; she is somewhere up the river with her bow pointed west and she is going back to that land that we*

*love so well - and has forgotten us; she is crowded with happy Yanks on their last ocean voyage. Yanks that WE have sent home.*

*We hear her last faint whistle as she pulls loose from her tugboat and goes plowing out into the deep blue waters of the mighty Atlantic. Still we sit and ponder "Why?" Below us in the court yard the Marine band is paying "Homeward Bound" - and it hits us right in the left side of our breasts - every soulful note of it.*

*"Who are we" - you ask. Why, we are just "Us," that's all; just a few fellows who were taken out of combatant organizations at the signing of the armistice and sent to Bordeaux. We are nobody, forgotten by that world of progress that has use only for the man that does things. And we don't crave your sympathy; we can't use your poetry; we don't ask to be sent home until we have finished the job. But we feel justified in asking that you be so considerate to remember us occasionally and WRITE US A LETTER.*

*Can you picture the mail orderly arriving in our office, his hands full of fresh, crisp letters, calling out the names of the fortunate recipients? We stand expectant and some of us are disappointed, for we receive not a letter. Forgotten by our own friends; that doesn't sound very bad to you, for you are in that land that the Hun didn't touch - we kept him away from you - but we are over here where his marks are ever visible. We are touched with the sadness of the havoc he has wrought. No poet has penned the true sentiment of his heart when his name is not called.*

*If you have a "him" who happens to be one of those left behind, why not send him a letter. Not a package of cigarettes or a box of candy, but a letter. It is what he needs. And you had forgotten us - well, well, well - it's a funny world. Every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost - and sometimes I am inclined to believe that the race is on and the hindmost is very truly yours, Edward R. Austin.*