

# Letters Home: Medical & Veterinary Corps

Edited by Trail End State Historic Site Superintendent Cynde Georgen

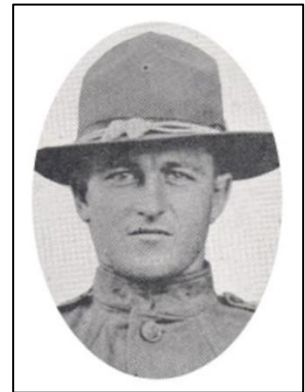
Between 1917 and 1919, *The Sheridan Post* and *The Sheridan Enterprise* donated considerable space to printing letters home from local soldiers and sailors serving both overseas and stateside. As part of the 2017-2018 *Wake Up America* exhibit, Trail End reprinted dozens of these letters, releasing 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 in the Medical Corps and the Veterinary Corps, including stretcher bearers, ambulance drivers, and wagoners.

## JOHN ALFRED PENTON – Army Veterinary Corps

Twenty-two year old John Penton was born in Nebraska. After moving to Wyoming in the early 1900s, he worked as a farm hand in Beckton. With his experience, it is probably not surprising that he was attached to the Army Veterinary Corps. He served both stateside and overseas, where horses were used for pulling everything from ambulances to heavy artillery. After the war, Penton stayed in Sheridan for a while, working as a driver for the Veterans Hospital at Fort Mackenzie. In the mid-1930s, he and his wife moved to Riverside, California, where he died in 1942.

Dated September 24, 1918, Penton's letter describes his life at the Veterinary Training School in Camp Lee, Virginia. It was printed in *The Sheridan Post* on October 11, 1918.



*Dear sister - Your letter just received and was very glad to get it and to learn that you were getting along so nicely. Suppose Elmer is very busy this fall, as every man should be whether he is on the farm or in the army.*

*I have been transferred from Camp Dodge, Iowa, to Camp Lee, Virginia, and since leaving home I have been through many states, but none of them looked as good to me as Montana.*

*Camp Lee is five miles from Petersburg and about twenty-five miles from Richmond. We are only 85 miles from Newport News, where there is an aviation training school. Almost every day we can see the airplanes flying over our camp, and there are always two of them together.*

*It has been somewhat disagreeable here ever since we arrived. It has not been so cold, but it has been damp and foggy, and the cold is the kind that goes right through a person.*

*We are only about two miles from the place where General Lee had his headquarters during the Civil War, and when we were out on a hike a few days ago, we went past the oldest cemetery in Virginia. It was laid out in 1702. After the Civil War many old soldiers were buried there. Some of the hardest fighting of the war was done near where Camp Lee is now located.*

*We are in quarantine now and do not know when we will be released. Some of the boys have the measles, and the Spanish influenza is in the camp. We get our throats sprayed twice a day as a preventative measure. If it was not for the quarantine, we would have been getting ready now to go across seas, but cannot tell now when we will go.*

*We are sure anxious to get over, but do not suppose we will be on the fighting line very much. Our duties will be to get the wounded horses, give them first aid, and get them back to the hospital as as soon as we can. Then we will take others to the front.*

*We only drill about two hours every day here at camp. The remainder of the day we spend at school. When the war is over and we get back, we will certainly know all about a horse. In the service we will not carry a rifle, but will have a six shooter about as big as a small cannon.*

### **WILLIAM ROBERT WALLACE – Provisional Ambulance Company 39**

Parkman farmer Bob Wallace was attending the University of Wyoming when he registered for the draft in June 1917. He was a member of the Student Army Training Corps at the university, but had no real military experience before he was inducted into the service in July 1918. On October 31, 1918, Wallace wrote a letter to his mother from Camp Upton, located - as he notes - in "about the center of Long Island." Camp Upton was one of several transient embarkation points established to house soldiers on their way overseas. From Camp Upton, soldiers marched to nearby Camp Mills, where they boarded the Long Island Railroad, which took them to the ferryboats which would then transport them to their ships. During his time in the army, Wallace was a wagoner (holding the rank of corporal) with Provisional Ambulance Company 39 (he also served with an unidentified evacuation ambulance company). As wagoner, he was responsible for the care and feeding of his horses as well as the operation and maintenance of his ambulance wagon.



*We are settled here [Camp Upton] for a few days, but we expect to go over in a day or so. I am still raring to go, and the sooner we start the better it will suit me. This is a pretty place. It is located in about the center of Long Island.*

*It is very warm here - last night it was as warm as a night in July at home. I have already taken a boat ride on the East and North Rivers from Jersey City to Brooklyn. I saw the Statue of Liberty and many big battle ships. I had a fine trip and saw a lot of pretty country, as well as pretty girls.*

*We left Fort Riley, Kansas, Sunday noon and got here Wednesday night. During all that time I was not off the train but three times for about half an hour each time. I only wish I was aboard the ship, for I am sure getting restless.*

*I will have lots to tell you when I come back. I am in the best evacuation ambulance company that ever left Fort Riley, and we have got the best officer in the bunch. Gus Schaubel, Charles Bell, Cecil Sturgis, Tom Ewoldson, Jesse Duncan and Emerson Hansey are here in this camp, but they are not in my company, but I have a chance every few days to see someone from Wyoming. I saw a fine boat on the East River with the name Wyoming painted on it. It looked good to me and I nearly yelled my lungs out. They know Wyoming is on the map, and you bet I let everybody know I am from Wyoming.*

*I got the cakes and cookies you sent me just before we started east, and you may be sure they tasted good, for all we had to eat on the train was corned beef and bread. We got plenty of sleep, however, for we had sleepers all the way from Kansas City.*

*I doubt if you could make a guess as to the kind of a place Long Island is. It reminds me somewhat of the mountains in Wyoming, pine trees are very plentiful and the principal crops are cabbage and potatoes - this is a great country for spuds.*

### **HERBERT HAROLD BRAMEL – Base Hospital 110**

Born in Clinton, Missouri, in 1895, Herbert Bramel and his family moved to Sheridan between 1900 and 1907. At the age of twelve, he got a job as a news carrier. In 1912, when the Bramel family moved to Clearmont, young Herald boarded in town so he could continue his studies. A graduate of Sheridan High School, Bramel was working as an insurance agent in Fergus County, Montana, when he signed up for the draft in June 1917. Inducted into the Army in November of that year, he didn't get to France until November 1918. Once there, Second Lieutenant Bramel worked at Base Hospital 110 near Mars-sur-Allier. After the war, Bramel returned to the states. He married in Montana in 1923, and by 1930 was living in Minnesota and working as a grocery salesman. By 1942, he was back in the insurance world, working for the Prudential Insurance Company in Superior, Wisconsin, where he died in 1987.



*Mars is a hospital center, there being ten or more big hospitals here with a capacity of 1,000 beds each, although all of them are not running full capacity. We got in about dark one night and started in setting up our hospital the next day, and the second day we got a few patients, about twenty. The buildings were here for us, but not fixed up with stoves and plumbing, and many of them without window panes. All that is a part of my work, as well as obtaining beds, mattresses, blankets, pillows, sheets, medicines, instruments and every other line of supplies, and issuing them out and keeping records of them, in the quartermaster, medical and ordinance departments. To make it the more pleasant, I have only one man to help me who knows anything about the work, and I need at least six. Besides the office force, I am supposed to have 25 outside men, and I have about twelve; but I suppose that will be remedied some time. If you think I haven't got a man-size job now, you're plumb wrong. If I stay on this job very long, my hair will be gray and I will probably be a candidate for the bug house.*

He might just have been suffering from exhaustion, but Bramel went on to have some not-so-very-kind things to say about his host country, its native females, and even the women working at his hospital:

*I will admit that France is a beautiful country, and I admire it, but everywhere is mud, mud, and rain and fog, except for three or four months in summer, and I can understand how the soldier boy felt when he said we would have played a good joke on the Germans if we had let them have France!*

*You have heard about the beauty of the French mademoiselles, but they aren't even in the race with our own American girls, judging by those I have seen. Now and then you get a flash of a brilliantly pretty girl, but Americans for mine. We have just received ten of our 100 nurses and though they are all American girls, there are only one or two who are good looking enough to look at twice. Rather poor samples, but guess they are good nurses.*

### **FLOYD SAMSON – Camp Hospital 60**

Stout, grey-eyed farmer Floyd Samson was living in Clearmont, Wyoming, when he registered for the draft in June 1917. A year later, at the age of twenty-four, he was inducted into the Army, where he served in the medical department. Honorably discharged in August 1919, Samson returned to both Clearmont and the agricultural life. World War Two found him working for the Moore Drydock Company in Oakland, one of the largest shipbuilding firms in the United States. Samson eventually returned to Sheridan, where he died in 1971. He is buried at the Custer Battlefield National Cemetery. During the war, Samson served overseas at Camp Hospital 60, located in the town of Corbigny in central France. He didn't have the easiest time

getting there, as he related in a letter to his family dated October 6, 1918, and printed in *The Sheridan Daily Enterprise* on November 6, 1918.

NOTE: We do not have a photograph of Floyd Stilts Samson 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).

*Dear Folks at home - This is Sunday and the first quiet day I've had since leaving Fort Riley. Have finally been assigned to one place and after many trials and tribulations, arrived. A bunch of us were assigned to a hospital two weeks ago and started out about 1 a.m.; hiked five miles and took a train ride three hours. Then we waited eleven hours for another train and when we got on again, I and three others occupied a compartment by ourselves and went to sleep. The rest of the outfit got off the train about 4 a.m., but failed to wake us so we kept right on riding til 7 o'clock; when we did get off, we had no idea where the rest of the company was, nor what our destination was and there was no one at the town to tell us anything. We got on the train that evening and went to another town where there were some troops stationed and tried to get straightened out there, but had no luck so went back to where we started from and laid around there til the captain got ready to send us out again. We were a day and a half covering a distance that we would make in about four hours in the states, and changed trains six times on the way. However, we are here and sure are in a fine place.*

*We are stationed near a small town and quartered in a big stone building that was built for a school and used for a while as a hospital. The boys said it was sure some job to clean it up and that I was lucky to have been lost. However, after riding these French trains for nearly a week, I think that I would as soon have been there working.*

*I have been on the move almost continuously since leaving the States and it sure seems good to be in a place and not have to keep my pack rolled ready for movement at any time. I haven't seen much of France as yet, but like this part better than any other I've seen so far. There have not been any American troops here before us and the people are very nice to us.*

*Our billet overlooks the town and a lot of country, and it is really a pretty country, too. Lots of green fields and trees and enough hills to make it look good to me.*

*Yesterday I had the first warm bath I've had since I left American soil and I sure did soak it up. These cold water baths are all right, but it is getting along too late in the fall for them in my estimation. I bathed in the river at our last camp; at least I went in the river and then came out and did my bathing on the bank. It was too cold to suit me.*

*Most of the boys are downtown this morning, either at church or somewhere else, but I thought I'd rather stay here and write than to bum around. I'll have plenty of time to bum after I get so I*

*can talk to these people. I can manage a few words, but generally run out of talk about the time I want to get some information and have to fall back on the dictionary and sign language and at that I have a hard time getting anyone to understand what I am driving at.*

*Got into camp too late for my ration of tobacco and as we have to buy it from a commissary up the line I will have to go on bumming till another issue comes in. I'm getting to be a regular bear at mooching anyway. Think I'll try to make my living that way when I get back. I expect though that there will be lots of men trying that and probably the field will be overworked.*

### **EVERETT DEYO HASBROUCK – 2<sup>nd</sup> Veterinary Corps**

Deyo Hasbrouck was a self-described “farmer” (read: rancher) in the tiny community of Ulm, Wyoming, when he registered for the draft in 1917. Born in Iowa, he had lived in Sheridan County since the age of five; first in Dayton and later in Sheridan. In 1918, he was assigned to the 2nd Veterinary Corps and served at a veterinary hospital in France, where he helped take care of the thousands of wounded horses returning from the front. After the end of the war, Hasbrouck stayed in France until June of 1919, after which he returned to Sheridan County and resumed his agricultural career.



NOTE: Like most men of his time, Hasbrouck was not concerned about using certain words - words that we would now consider to be racial epithets - in normal conversation. This letter, published in *The Sheridan Daily Enterprise* in January 1919, contains some of that language. It was not censored then and we are not censoring it now.

*Dear Folks - Censorship has been lifted, so will drop you a few lines to let you know where I am and what I am doing. We have been located at the same place ever since we have been in France, Claye Souilly, which is a small town about 16 miles east and a little north of Paris. Have been into Paris twice. It is sure a gay burg; it is the only place I've struck in France that suits me.*

*We have been in actual service since landing here, caring for and doctoring horses that came back from the front played out and shot to pieces. For the most part, I have been working in the office which makes a pretty good winter job and from the way things look to me, I am going to have a job with Uncle Sam for the remainder of the winter. We have got a big bunch of horses on hand now and are building sheds enough to shelter 2,000 head, so I think we have got a peach of a chance to stay here all winter.*

*I never told you anything about leaving the States. ... We left Newport News for France [on] July 26th and landed in Brest, France, [on] August 6th. I didn't get a bit sea sick and enjoyed every bit of the trip. After unloading at Brest, we marched about three miles to a rest camp where we stayed three days, then we were loaded in boxcars, 40 men to a car, and the cars are about half the size of a United States car. You can readily see how much room we had. We were on these boxcars three days and nights and then we were unloaded at Mitry Mori and marched three miles to the place where we are now.*

*Shortly after we landed here about 30 of us made a trip to the front at Chateau-Thierry with about 200 head of horses. We were on the cars about four days and saw lots of sunny France (as they call it). Seems to me "Rainy France" would hit the mark for it has rained most of the time for the last two months; mud is knee deep to a tall Indian now.*

*After we unloaded our horses and turned them over to a remount squadron, we went swimming in the Marne River and then spent the rest of the evening walking over the battlefield and, take it from me, things are badly shot up in that neck of the woods. Small towns look like one big rock pile.*

*Now comes the funny part (wasn't much fun at the time).*

*That night we bedded down alongside the railroad track and close to the depot - or what was left of the depot. At about 9:30 some officer showed up and told us we were sleeping in a rather dangerous place, for about every other night the Boche made a raid on the place and tried to blow up the track. You see, we hadn't had any experience with these air raids and didn't think much of it, so we stayed where we were, but he told us if one should come, to run for a dugout. Well, we didn't know where the dugouts were, and it was dark then, so we rolled over and went to sleep.*

*About 11 o'clock the anti-aircraft guns brought us to life and they were sure pumping lead into the air. I raised up in bed, wondering which way to run when all at once a shell or bomb bursted just across the track from us and two more bursted before I could get out of bed. You could see rock and fire flying for 200 feet in the air. Well, it didn't take me much longer to decide which way to run, and I sure did hit the high spots. There were a bunch of niggers stationed close to where we were and they were like us, green at the job, and about every two jumps I would make, there would be a nigger go by me like a shot out of a gun. After it was all over, one old nigger walked up to me still puffing like a steam engine, and said, "Dey works you all day, den runs you all night!"*

## R. B. DICK – 52<sup>nd</sup> Battalion

During the war, Private R. B. Dick served in the British Expeditionary Force (or possibly the Canadian Expeditionary Force) as a foot soldier in the 52nd Battalion. In October 1918, he was transferred to the 27th Battalion, which saw considerable action on the front lines. Although not from Sheridan, Sheridan County, or even Wyoming, Private R. B. Dick apparently counted several Sheridan residents amongst his acquaintance, at least one of whom was fortunate enough to correspond with him. In the letter reproduced below, Private Dick provides a fearsomely graphic account of what it was like to be a stretcher bearer in the middle of a major battle.

NOTE: We have no further information on Private R. B. Dick. If you have knowledge of him, please contact us at [trailend@wyo.gov](mailto:trailend@wyo.gov).

*Just a few lines to let you know that I am well and safe. I was transferred from the 52nd Battalion to the 27th and reached the 27th last Sunday. That same night we went up the line until two days ago. The party I was with acted as stretcher bearers and, believe me, war certainly seemed to me an awful waste of life as we carried out man after man, some slightly wounded and others seriously. Night and day the whole battle field vibrated with the thunder of the big guns. The boys would go over, and we would follow with the stretchers.*

*I will never forget our last night as long as I live. I know that in the near future I will be going over the top with a rifle instead of a stretcher, but no matter what happens, it will leave no deeper impression than did that last night. There had been hard fighting all day, real hard, and we were weary, but the night time was worst of all. Most all night we wandered over the shell torn land, guided by the groans of the wounded. Oh, it was horrible. Every once in a while, the Germans would send up a flare and make the night like day, the snipers' bullets would whistle past us and the shells fall close by. As I look back on it all, it seems like a dream.*

*It was about three o'clock in the morning when we took a rest in a trench close by the roadside, but I could not sleep. The wounded were being put into ambulances on the road. On one of our trips while a line of stretchers were going down the road, a German plane spotted us and, believe me, it was nip and tuck for cover. He swept the road with machine gun bullets. Just a little ways further down, we picked up a serious case. A red-headed, freckled-face boy lay moaning. We saw he was pretty bad, so we went over to him. He was shot in the stomach and on the way he died. We just took him off the stretcher and buried him by the roadside.*

*So it goes, from day to day, as it has gone on for the last four years, men and good strong men, bleeding and dying for the cause of justice and freedom, but we are winning now, the Germans are retreating, and the silver lining is beginning to show through the storm cloud. Very soon*



*now, peace will reign over battle torn France. Some of us will come home again and the rest sleep beneath a foreign sky. No matter what happens, I want you to always know that everything will be well. "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil."*

*Good night, and God bless you all.*