

The Shoebox



We refer to it simply as “The Shoebox”. This tattered cardboard box was rescued from a storeroom in New Jersey and its contents became the focal point of a tireless search for the story of the Bruce family from Paterson, NJ during the First World War. Late, on a snowy Christmas Eve night at a local inn, the cover of the Shoebox was unsealed for the first time in decades revealing its carefully placed contents. Unknowingly, what lay before us was a collection of remarkable keepsakes that when pieced together, reveal the story of immeasurable sacrifice and grief.

Although our paths will never cross, there exists a bond between the Bruce family and I merely because of the shoebox. The journey it has taken me on over the last few years has been captivating, at times frustrating, but most of all, overwhelmingly rewarding. After years of endless research and a trip to their hometown of Patterson, NJ, I feel that I have come to know a few things about this family. First, Elizabeth who was a first-generation immigrant held a sincere love for her family and embraced a deep affection for this Country. Second, when her three sons left home to serve in the Army she was bursting with pride. And lastly, when two of her sons died just fourteen days apart, she nobly accepted their loss. In a letter to her son Thomas Jr who was serving in France at the time, she eloquently expressed her sentiment by writing:

“I keep thinking what a different world it will be to all others when you all come marching home again! And when you do come marching home old fellow bring me back the same boy I gave my country, true, and clean, and gentle, and brave. You must do this for your father, and me, and Betty, and Nora; and most of all, for the daughter you will give to me one of these days!

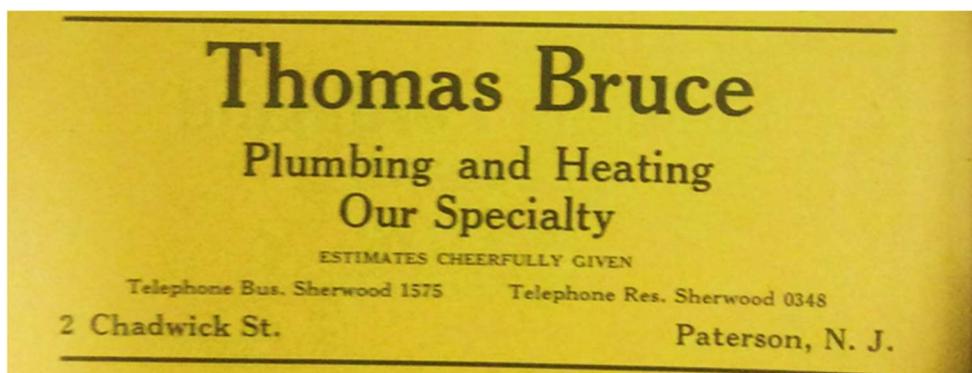
Dear, I don't know whether you have even met her yet, but never mind that! Live for her or if God wills, die for her; but do either with courage, with honor and clean mirth! Best I know you will come back to me.”

Mother

With parents that immigrated to the United States from Ireland, Thomas Bruce was born on September 10th, 1869 in New Jersey. With limited schooling, he began work at the age eleven in a local flax mill in Paterson, NJ. Knowing that he could not earn a suitable wage to raise a family working in a factory, he acquired the skills to become a plumber and eventually opened his own business.

Elizabeth K Bruce, maiden name Elis K MacPherson, was born in Scotland on August 10th, 1872 to a father of English and mother of Scottish descent. In 1888 at the age of sixteen, she immigrated to the United States eventually settling in Paterson, New Jersey. Nicknamed the “Silk City” for its dominant output of silk fabric, Paterson was a magnet for immigrants in the early nineteenth century. Thriving in manufacturing, many of the local factories in Patterson were powered by the 77-foot high Great Falls of the Passaic.

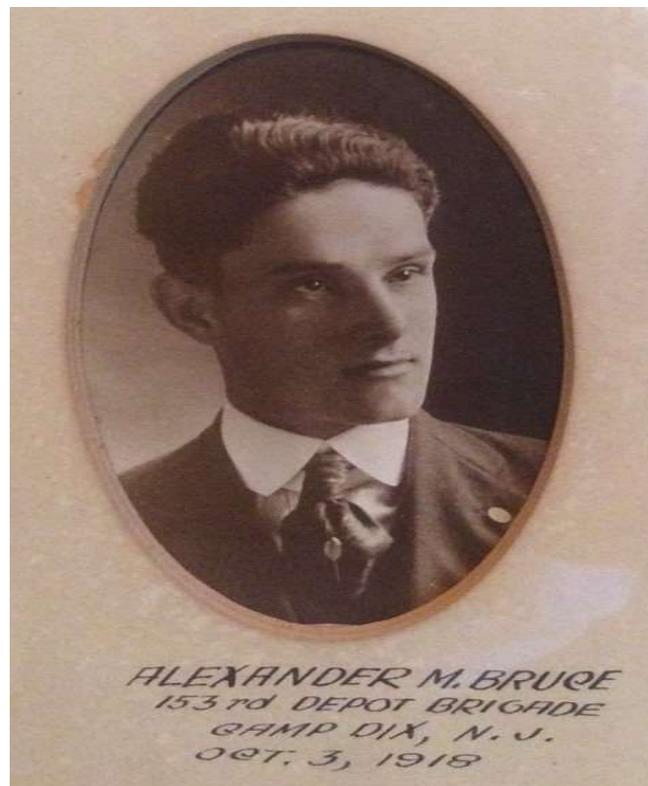
On July 6th, 1891, Elizabeth and Thomas wed and soon thereafter started a family. With the birth of five sons, Alexander, James, Thomas, Hume, and Charles and two daughters Elizabeth and Mary, they resided in a modest two-story home located at 557 Main Street in Paterson. Before the United States entered the war, daily life for the Bruce family was all but uneventful. Thomas, along with his son Alexander, continued working in the family plumbing business while Elizabeth cared for their seven children. The oldest daughter Elizabeth worked at a local box shop, and the remaining children James, Thomas, Hume, Charles, and Mary, attended school.



Advertisement from 1918 phone book for the Bruce family plumbing business

Dear Jim I suppose you know by this time of our great loss Bessie wrote and told you. I know it will be a great blow to you but Jim you know he was always a good boy and he has gone to his reward and he died for his Country and he will always live in our memory. I was with him before he died but he could not speak to me. I asked him if he knew me and he nodded his head that was all he could do but it was good to be near him.....

Shortly after the United States entered the First World War on April 6th, 1917, James enlisted in the Army. Alexander the oldest son, didn't enter the service until his induction on September 3rd, 1918. Assigned to the 39th Company, 153 Depot Brigade, 10th Training Battalion, and stationed at Camp Dix, New Jersey just seventy-five miles south of Patterson, his service to the Country would be short-lived. On October 3rd, he contracted Lobar Pneumonia at Camp Dix and died with his mother at his bedside. Alexander is buried in Laurel Grove Memorial Park, Totowa, Passaic County, New Jersey, alongside his maternal grandparents.



Alexander M. Bruce

My dear Jim,

I am writing to you today because I am thinking about you a great deal. Bessie received a letter from you and in it you said you were well, and it filled me with comfort, and you spoke about coming home for the first time. Dear Jim, it will be one of the happiest days of my life when I see you again and Dear Brother Tom....

James enlisted in the Engineer Corp, U.S. Regulars at Ft. Slocum, NY on May 19, 1917 just one month after the United States entered the First World War. After initial training, he was sent to Washington, DC and assigned to Company C of the Sixth Engineers. For the next six months, his unit trained at Camp American University, Washington, DC.

On December 3rd, 1917 the Regiment embarked on the USS George Washington and set sail, landing in France on December 20th, 1917. Immediately after disembarking, the Regiment traveled by train to the province of Haute Marne and Haute Saone where for several weeks they repaired roads and constructed temporary buildings in the American Divisional area. In the early months of 1918, his unit was sent into action for the first time on the British and Australian front.

In June 1918, James's unit joined the Third Division and participated in several of the greatest battles of the War to include: Somme, Marne, Chateau Thierry, St. Mihiel, and Meuse-Argonne. In the battle of Chateau-Thierry, James was wounded in the face and hand by shrapnel and was cited for bravery by Brigadier General Ulysses McAlexander "Rock of the Marne".

On October 17th, 1918 James was fighting on the front lines in the Battle of the Meuse-Argonne. Published in 1920 "History of the 6th Engineers" a detailed account of James's death was cited:

"Then began a seemingly endless period when the company weltered in the muddy shell holes, for the rain was continuous. During the day it was impossible to move, for the slightest change in position provoked a hail of enemy bullets from the concealed

Boche snipers in the Clair Chene Woods. It was impossible to bring food up to the positions during the day, and by nightfall the men were ravenously hungry.

At 7 A.M. October 17th, Captain Gladding arrived and took command of the company. The position was being heavily shelled by the enemy. Lieutenant Anderson was slightly in the knee and Lieutenant Chantos knocked unconscious by the concussion from a large shell exploding nearby.

*On October 17th, at 7:30 P.M., the company was relieved from the line by the Fourth Infantry. In small groups they crawled down the hill into the gulch. At 9:15 P.M., guided by Runner Fitzhugh, the march to camp began. Again, the enemy barraged the paths heavily and, in addition to the wounded, **Privates Bruce**, Chronister and O'Donnell were killed. The men were marched back to the kitchen, where they were served with a warm meal. Many were so weak from exposure that they had to be carried from the line. Quite a few were evacuated to the hospital.*

That very same day in Patterson, NJ. Elizabeth penned a letter to her son James. Sadly, she was unaware that on the front lines in France, he had made the supreme sacrifice. When Elizabeth receives her letter back with the words “Missing in Action” inscribed on the front of the envelope, she begins to write numerous letters to members of his Company inquiring his whereabouts and well-being.



Original envelope containing Elizabeth's letter. Note the words "Missing in Action"

Mrs. Bruce left a legacy of responses to her letters that shows her determination to find out the fate of her son James. One of the letters she receives describes in detail the horror of the battle in which James was killed. Her inquiries prompted letters of praise from those that fought with him which helped her to learn more about her very brave son.

557 Main St., Paterson, N.J.

Feb. 28, 1919

Dear Mrs. Bruce,

Your note of inquiry to Sergt. Brunner some time ago with reference to your son James who has been reported by the War Dept. as "missing" was shown me a few days ago. I had a long talk with Sergt. Brunner who knew him well, and from him I learned what he knew of the matter.

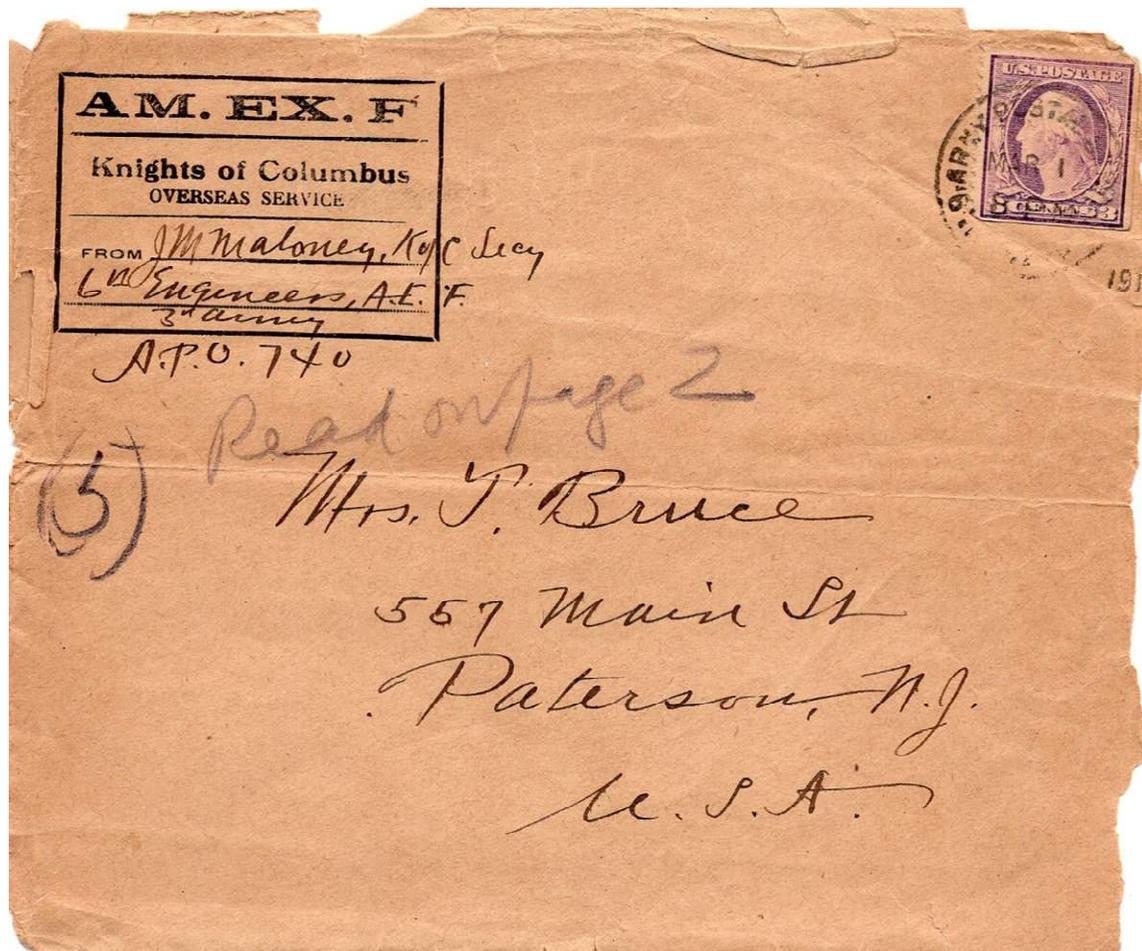
Your son was a member of C Company, 6th Engineers, an organization of wonderful achievements. On Oct. 17th, his Company was on duty in the front line in that charmed area of destruction known as the Argonne Forest where so many of our gallant boys were lost. His duty was that of a "Runner" (dispatch bearer) between Co. P.C. and Batt. P.C. during a dreadfully heavy barrage in which six other "Runners" lost their lives. The battle at this point in the forest was fierce and terrific. The woods were filled with smoke and bursting shells. It was about 4 o'clock in the afternoon he left Co. P.C. with a message for Batt. P.C. but so far as is known he never cleared the storm of deadly shrapnel that rained over the interning space. When the battle was over, and brutal Huns were driven from the wood his body was not found, or if so, bore no evidence of recognition in identification. All agree he met the same fate as the other six valiant lads. Of this, there seems to be no doubt, Dear Mrs. Bruce, it is with deep regret that I relate these few meager facts of his glorious passing.

James was in good health, well liked by all the men in his Company, including the officers. He was a good soldier and certainly a brave one. He was no slacker or shirker- he was a man! You may feel proud of his record, much as you lament his death. He gave his life in battle, under his own colors, on the field of honor, in the front line. He made the supreme sacrifice and, in his passing,, you also made yours.

May God bless and comfort you in your sad bereavement. I know that a merciful God will take care of him. Should any further information come to me I the future, I will gladly communicate it to you.

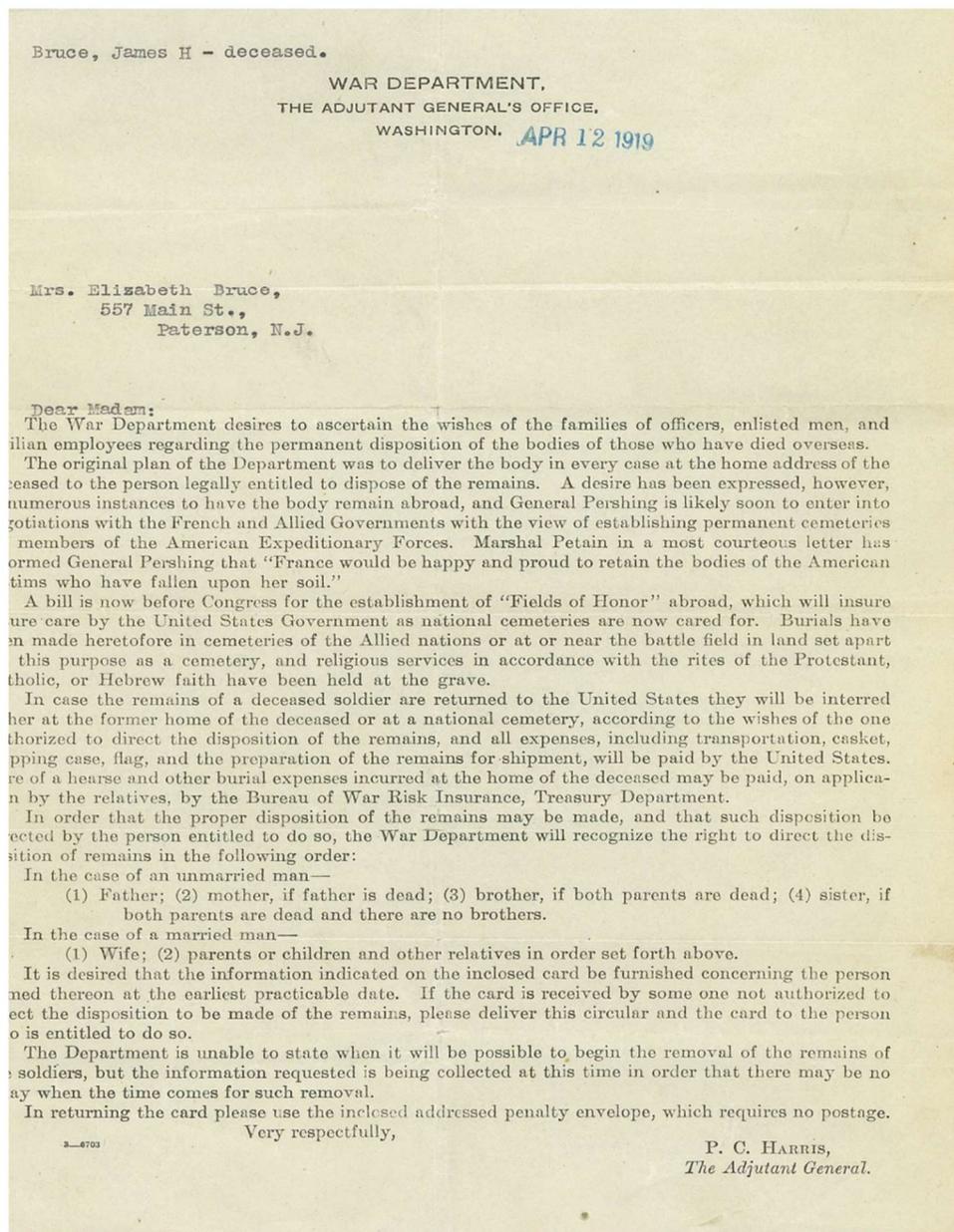
Yours truly,

J.M. Maloney, K. of C Secy, 6th Engineers, 3rd Army A.E.F.



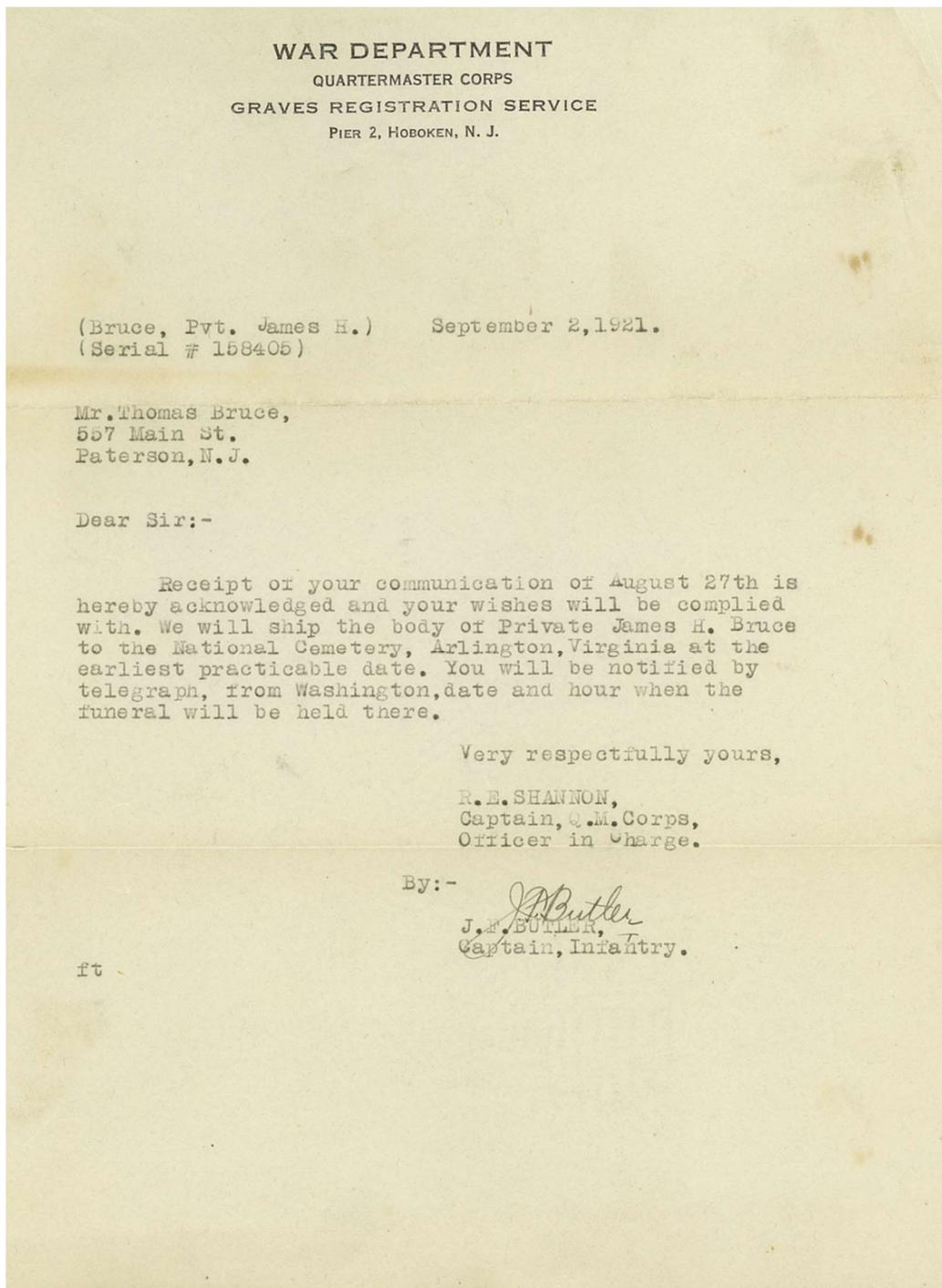
Original envelope containing J.M. Maloney's letter to Elizabeth Bruce

With almost 80,000 American dead buried overseas, many families demanded that the remains of their loved one be brought back home. In April of 1919, the War Department mailed a letter to each next of kin inquiring how they wanted to honor their loved one.



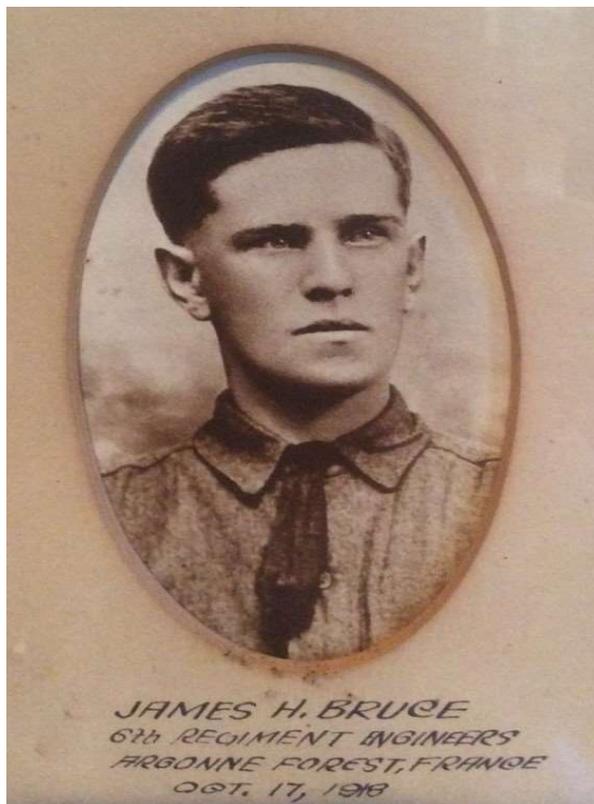
Letter from War Department to the Bruce family inquiring about their wishes for the final burial place of James

For the Bruce family it was paramount to bring James's remains back home to American soil, the same in which he died for. In September of 1921, Elizabeth received confirmation from the War Department that her son's remains would soon be returned.



Letter from War Department to the Bruce family acknowledging that the remains of their son James will be taken to Arlington National Cemetery.

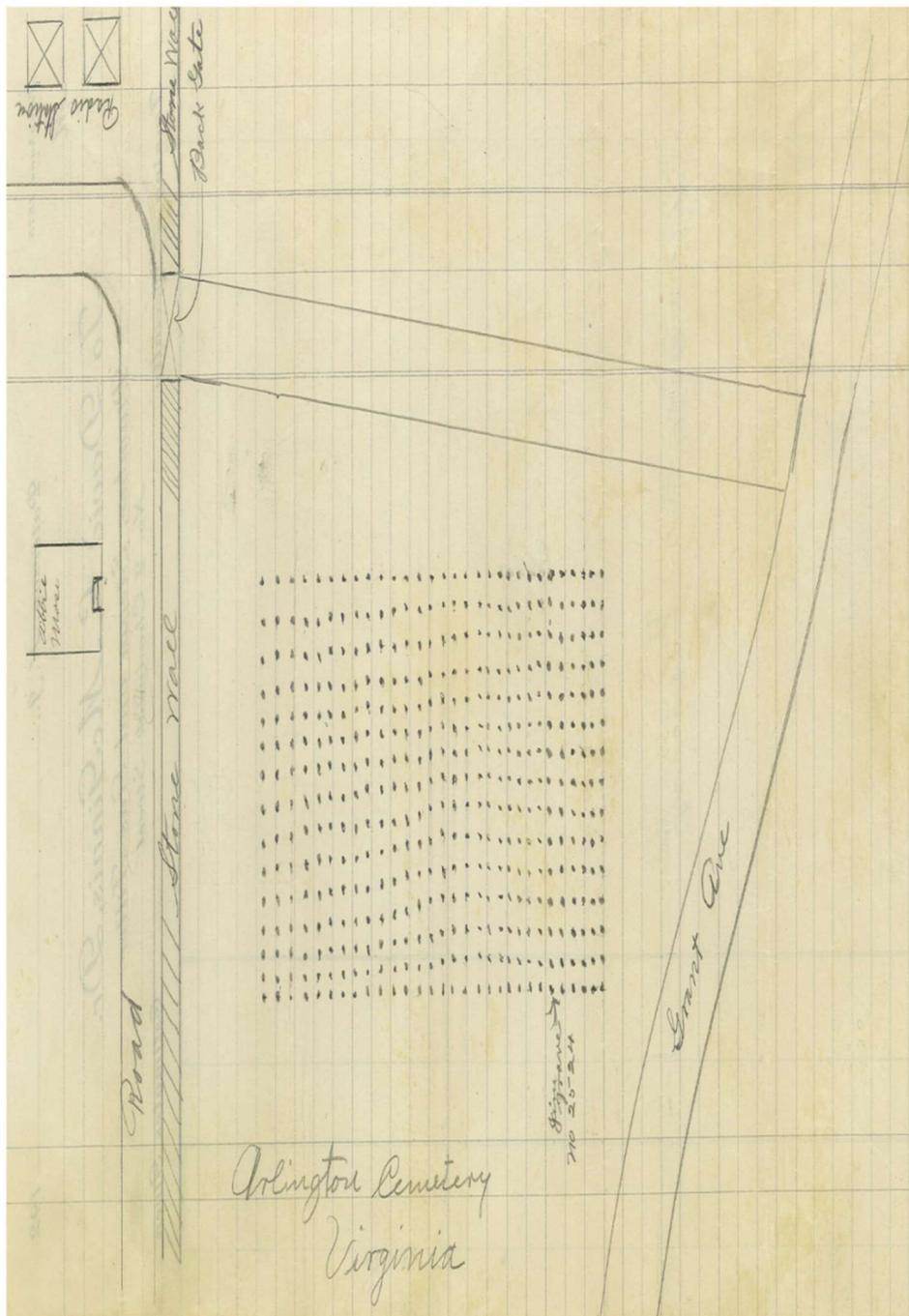
On September 8th, 1921, James was re-interred in the Arlington National Cemetery with his mother, father, and sister Bessie bearing witness.



Private James Hume Bruce

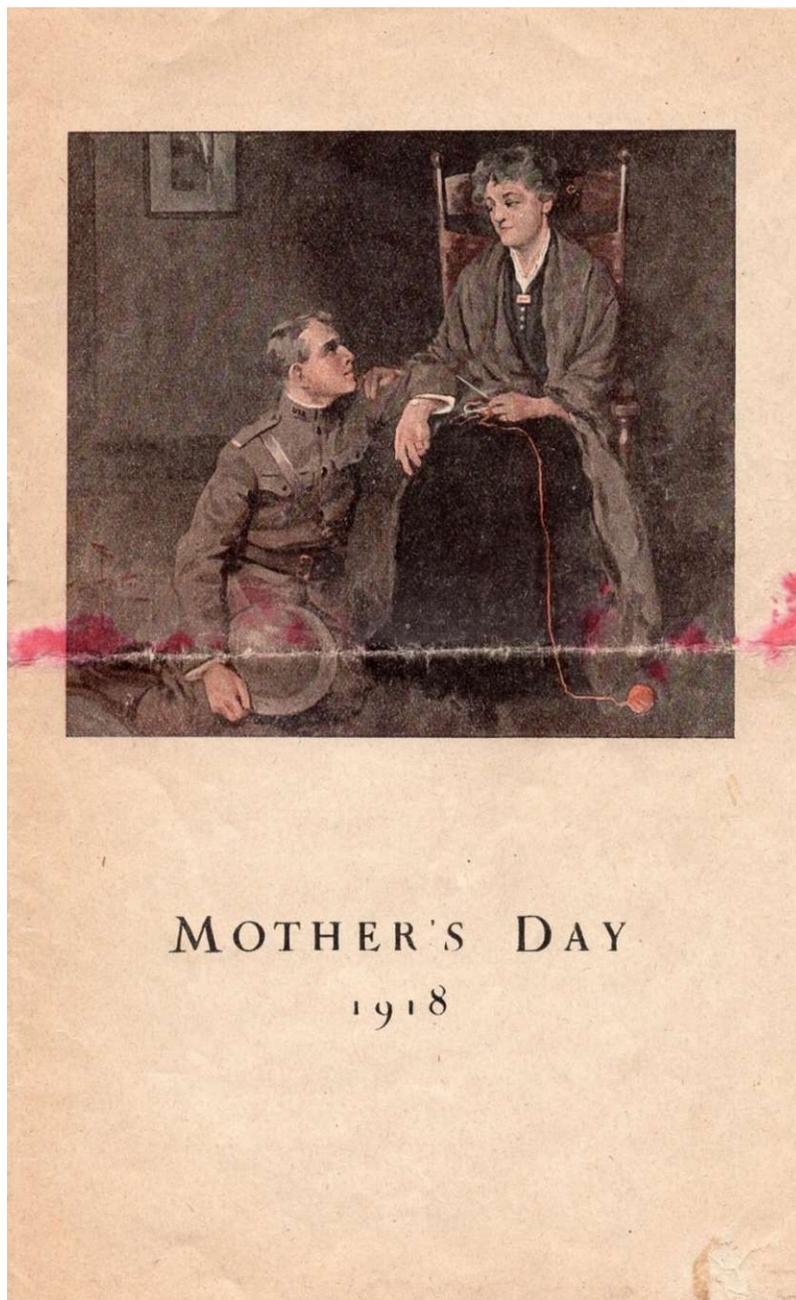


To remember the exact location of their son's grave, Thomas Bruce, Sr. hand drew a map describing in detail where his son James was buried. On the reverse side of the map, Bess made the annotation "James Grave, Pa drew it". In the row of dots representing headstones, Thomas Bruce identifies his son's grave with an arrow and inscription "James Grave 18-2524 (headstone number noting location).



Hand-Drawn map by Thomas Bruce Sr. showing exact location of his sons grave. On the reverse side, Bessie wrote "James's grave, Pa drew it"

Thomas, Jr., their only son to survive the war, enlisted in the Army on February 16th, 1918. After training, he was assigned to Base Hospital #116, Bazoilles Sur Meuse, France. Located in eastern France near the border with Germany, he was in the same area of France where his brother James was killed in action. While in France, Thomas Jr. receives back the very same Mother's Day card he sent earlier in the year to his mother.



1918 Mother's Day Card from Thomas Jr. to his mother Elizabeth

THE MAN MY MOTHER
THINKS I AM

Whilst walking down a crowded city street the
|other day,
I heard a little urchin to a comrade turn and Say :
" Hi, Chimmie, lemme tell youse, I'd be happy
|as a clam
If I only was de feller dat my mudder tinks I am

She tinks I am a wonder, and she knows her little
|lad
Could never mix with nuttin dat was ugly, mean
|or bad.
Oh, lots of times I sit and tink how nice 'twould
|be, gee whiz,
If a feller was de feller dat his mudder tinks he is. "

My friend, be yours a life of toil or undiluted joy,
You can learn a wholesome lesson from that small,
|unlettered boy.
Don't aim to be an earthly saint, with eyes fixed
|on a star ;
Just try to be the fellow that your mother thinks
|you are,

WILLIS ALKIN.

To my darling Mother,
With Everlasting Love

Private Thomas Bruce.

May. 12, 1918.

With Love to the Family.

Tommy.

Writings of Thomas Jr. to his mother Elizabeth

Inside the returned card, Elizabeth wrote the following to her son:

My dear boy.
Your father says to tell you that he will give his son to his country, but that he will be (never mind what!) if he will give all his new suspenders. He says you pinched three pairs from the top drawer of his bureau - he adds that he "is onto your curves." Nora says you were very wise to take them, & she would give you all of hers, if she had any! Betty says to tell you that she hears Jack Ellis sails next week; - I know just how how his mother will feel for those ten days while he is crossing. But she wouldn't have had him stay at home, any more than I would have had

you! All the same, she won't have a good night's sleep until she hears he has landed. I keep thinking what a different world it will be to mothers, when you all come marching home again! And when you do come marching home, ^{old fellow,} bring me back the same boy I gave my country, - true, & clean, & gentle, & brave. You must do this for your father & me & Betty & Nora; - & most of all, for the daughter you will give to me one of these days! Dear, I don't know whether you have ever met her yet, - but never mind that! Live for her & if God wills, die for her; - but do either with courage, - "with honour & clean mirth!" But I know you will come back to me -
Mother

Writings of Elizabeth to her son Private First-Class Thomas Jr. Bruce

My Dear Boy,

Bars father says to tell you that he will give his son to his country, but he will beif he will give all his new suspenders. He says you picked three pairs from the top drawer of his bureau- he adds that he is on to your curves. Nora says you were very wise to take them, and she would give you all of hers if she had any. Betty says to tell you that she hears Jack Ellis sails next week; I know just how his mother will feel for those ten days while he is crossing. But she wouldn't have had him stay at home any more than I would have had you. All the same, she won't have a good night's sleep until she hears he has landed.

I keep thinking what a different world it will be to all others when you all come marching home again! And when you do come marching home old fellow bring me back the same boy I gave my country, true, and clean, and gentle, and brave. You must do this for your father, and me, and Betty, and Nora; and most of all, for the daughter you will give to me one of these days!

Dear, I don't know whether you have even met her yet, but never mind that! Live for her or if God wills, die for her; but do either with courage, with honor and clean mirth! Best I know you will come back to me.

Mother

Thomas returned home in May of 1919 aboard the S.S. Finland and on May 15th, 1919, was discharged at Camp Dix, NJ.

Sheet No. _____		PASSENGER LIST OF ORGANIZATIONS AND CASUALS				_____	
Class _____		RETURNING TO THE UNITED STATES				_____	
<p>INSTRUCTIONS</p> <p>Separate lists of THIRTEEN COPIES EACH will be accomplished by each company or detachment commander as follows:</p> <p>1st Class: Officers arranged according to rank, Nurses, Army Field Clerks, Field Clerks Q. M. C., Civilian Employees. Names to be numbered consecutively beginning with No. 1.</p> <p>2nd Class: Non-commissioned Officers down to and including Color Sergeant (See A. R. Par. 9).</p> <p>3rd Class: All enlisted men below Color Sergeant (A. R. Par. 9), arranged according to usual formation of the Company, that is, BY SQUADS.</p> <p>This form when used to list CASUAL, military passengers will be accomplished in like manner, but within each class all casualties will be sub-grouped under the following headings with reference to the reason for their return, not more than one such sub-group being listed on the same sheet: (1) Deceased, (2) Sick and Wounded (3) Prisoners, (4) For Duty, (5) On Leave or Furlough (6) Miscellaneous. The word "Casuals" and the name of the group will be entered in the space provided for name of organization, and the Embarkation Personnel Adjutant will sign his name in the space provided for the signature of organization commander.</p>							
To be filled in by company or detachment commander.		Give full name of organization including company and regimental designation		To be filled in by Embarkation Personnel Adjutant, U. S. A.			
		Name of vessel		Date of sailing		Date of Arrival	
		FINLAND		ST. NAZAIRE, APRIL 20, 1919		APR 30 1919	
No.	NAME AND SERIAL NUMBER	Rank and Arm or Staff Corp. Example: Capt. A. G.	Organization (regiment and company or detachment)	NOTIFY IN CASE OF EMERGENCY (Give name in full, for example: Mrs. Mary A. Smith)	Relationship Example: Foster-mother	ADDRESS (Number, Street, City and State) Do not abbreviate	
<p>SHEET NO. O. Leave double space between entries. All typewriting must be in CAPITAL LETTERS.</p> <p>OFFICERS COMMANDING CONVALESCENT DETACHMENTS.</p> <p>OFFICER COMMANDING A. & B. (OFFICERS AND LITERS)</p> <p>1 FOOTE, EUGENE MAJOR CC MD MRS E C FOOTE WIFE 1024 HASTINGS AVE HASTINGS NEBRASKA <i>To Camp Dix</i> AUTH: SO 1 PAR. 1, EVAC. HOSP 8 & VO MAJOR EMERY EMBARKATION OFFICE V. S. TROOPS HQ NANTES.</p> <p>OFFICER ASSISTING MAJOR FOOTE, A & B. (OFFICERS & LITERS)</p> <p>2 KREMER, DRG WILFRED 1ST LT BH 119 MC MRS FLORENCE D. KREMER WIFE 3738 JANSSEN AVE CHICAGO ILLINOIS. <i>See No 23 Sheet 2-A Casual, S. & W.</i></p> <p>OFFICER IN CHARGE OF MENTAL RESTRAINT.</p> <p>3 FARGO, LEON KENDALL CAPT. MED. CPS MRS L FARGO MOTHER 746 DOLPHIN ST BALTIMORE MARYLAND. <i>To Post Surgeon - Hatcher 919</i></p> <p>OFFICER COMMANDING CONVALESCENT DETACHMENT NO. 175.</p> <p>4 GARRETT, DAVY LEWIS CAPT. BH 88 MC MRS RUBY RUTH GARRETT WIFE 681 E CYPRESS ST ALTUS, OKLAHOMA. <i>To Camp Merritt & Return to P. O. C. for Duty</i> AUTH: HQ SOS 3/13/19.</p> <p>OFFICER COMMANDING CONVALESCENT DETACHMENT NO. 176.</p> <p>5 PERKINS, CHARLES EDWIN CAPT. CC MC MRS CHARLES E PERKINS WIFE ST ALBANS GREENS NEW YORK NEW YORK <i>To Co. Dix</i></p> <p>OFFICER COMMANDING CONVALESCENT DETACHMENT NO. 177.</p> <p>6 BRAIN, CHARLES E CAPT. BH 69 MC MRS EDNA BENSON BRAIN WIFE 107 T STREET SALT LAKE CITY UTAH <i>To Co. Dix</i> AUTH: HQ SOS 10 104 PP 17 4/14/19.</p> <p>OFFICER COMMANDING CONVALESCENT DETACHMENT NO. 178.</p> <p>7 FURDY, GEORGE CAPT. BH 116 MC MRS GEORGE PURDY WIFE NEW LIBERTY KENTUCKY <i>To Co. Dix</i> AUTH: HQ SOS PAR. 35 SO 90 3/31/19.</p> <p>OFFICER COMMANDING CONVALESCENT DETACHMENT NO. 179.</p> <p>8 NUTT, JOHN CAPT. BH 119 MC MRS G D NUTT MTHR WILLIAMSPORT PENNSYLVANIA. <i>To Co. Dix</i> AUTH: PP 10 SO 107 4/15/17 HQ SOS RS 1 <i>See No 23 Sheet 1-A Casual - S. & W.</i></p> <p>9 GOODWIN CHARLES I 1ST LT BH 119 MC MRS C I GOODWIN WIFE WALTERBORO SOUTH CAROLINA <i>To Co. Dix</i> AUTH: HQ US TROOPS NANTES BS 1 MED CORPS MR ARLINGTON C STEARNS FTH 143 ROWE ST MELROSE MASSACHUSETTS. SO 107 PAR 10 4/16/17.</p> <p>10 HAYDEN, HERBERT L CPL CC MD MR FRED HAYDEN FATHER 35 FORHAM ST CAMBRIDGE MASSACHUSETTS. <i>To Co. Merritt</i> AUTH: HQ US TROOPS NANTES BS 1 SO 107 PAR 18 4/16/17.</p> <p>11 CORLISS, FRANK COOK CC MD MRS JOANNA CORLISS MOTHER 3 HANCOCK ST LAWRENCE MASSACHUSETTS. <i>To Co. Merritt</i> AUTH: HQ US TROOPS NANTES BS 1 SO 107 PAR 10 4/16/17. 6447130</p> <p>12 BARRY, ALFRED T COOK CC MD MR THOMAS R BARRY FATHER FORT KENT MAINE. <i>To Co. Merritt</i> AUTH: HQ US TROOPS NANTES BS 1 SO 107 PAR. 10 4/16/17 644709</p> <p>13 BRUCE, THOMAS PFC CC MD MR THOMAS BRUCE FATHER 357 MAIN ST PATERSON NEW JERSEY <i>To Co. Merritt</i> AUTH: HQ US TROOPS NANTES BS 1 SO 107 PAR 10 4/16/17</p> <p>14 BUCK, HAROLD J PFC CC MD MRS MINNIE BUCK MOTHER 808 SIXTH AVE DETROIT MICHIGAN <i>To Co. Merritt</i> AUTH: HQ US TROOPS NANTES BS 1 SO 107 PAR 10 4/16/17</p> <p>15 CASAVANT, GEORGE A PFC CC MD MRS EMORY CASAVANT MTHR 20 MORSE ST NATICK MASSACHUSETTS. <i>To Camp Merritt</i> AUTH: HQ US TROOPS, NANTES, BS 1 SO 107 PAR. 10 4/16/17</p>							

Ship's roster of returning soldiers. Private First-Class Thomas Jr. third from bottom

After the war, the Bruce family would remain in Patterson, NJ. Elizabeth passed away on November 12th, 1944, and her loving husband Thomas would follow just four weeks later on December 14th, 1944.



The Shoebox and a Mother's collection

Elizabeth would leave a collection of keepsakes of the time when her family sacrificed so much. Each piece was carefully placed in the shoebox where they remained for more than ninety years.



Bruce Family Service Flag

A gold star for James and Alexander and blue star for Thomas, Jr.

4

and I received a grand
letter from her this morn-
ing she wrote such a
nice letter it certainly
dove me good she said
she got a letter three
weeks ago from you.
she said she was going
to write you a letter
of comfort, so Jim I want
you to be a brave boy
and keep up your good
work so that you will
soon be home again.
David Phillips is back
and he sent word to me
that he mailed your

557 Main St.
Oct. 17, 1918.

My Dear Jim,
I am writing
to you to day because I am
thinking about you a great
deal. Bessie received a letter
from you and in it you
said you were well, and
it filled me with comfort,
and you spoke about coming
home for the first time.
Dear Jim it will be one
of the happiest days of my
life when I see you again
and Dear Brother Tom

3

but it was good to be
near him and he lies beside
his Grand mother and
his Grand father he had
a grand funeral the
Bible class carried him
and the Junior order
covered him with flowers
and they sang Nearer my
God to thee and I know
he is in Heaven now
singing with the Angels
and now all we have
to do now is to live so
that we can join him in
the skies Bessie wrote
and told Isabelle

2

Dear Jim I suppose you
know by this time of our
great loss Bessie wrote
and told you I know it
will be a great blow to
you, but Jim you know he
was always a good boy
and he has gone to his
reward, and he died for
his country and he will
always live in our Memory
I was with him before
he died but he could not
speak to me I asked him
if he knew me and he
nodded his head that
was all he could do.

Original letter from Elizabeth to her son Private James Bruce

Written on October 17th, 1918 the very same day James was killed in action in France

554 Main St.

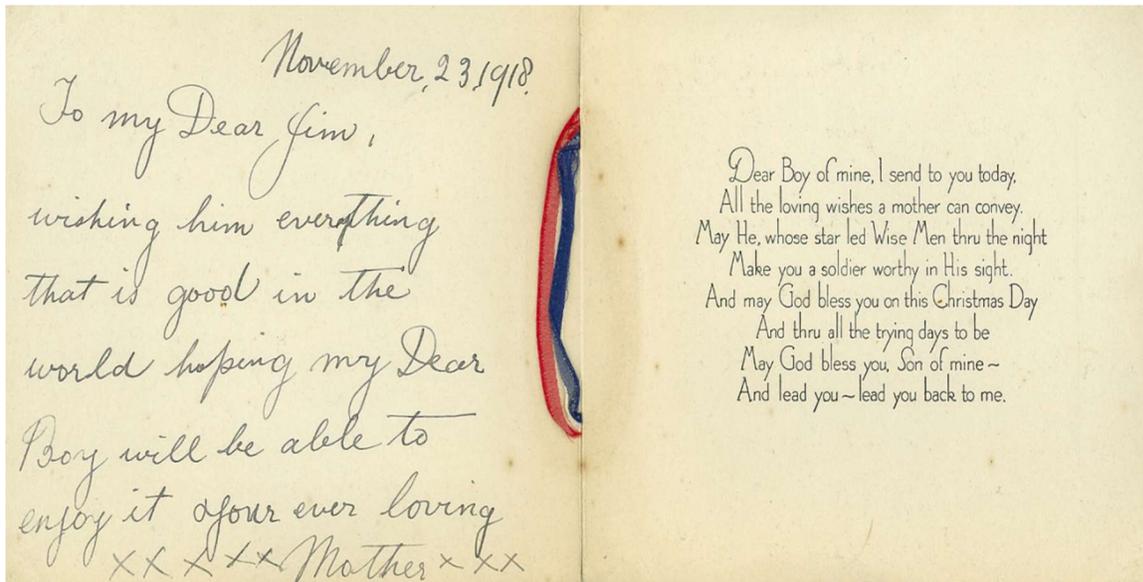
Oct.17th, 1918

My dear Jim,

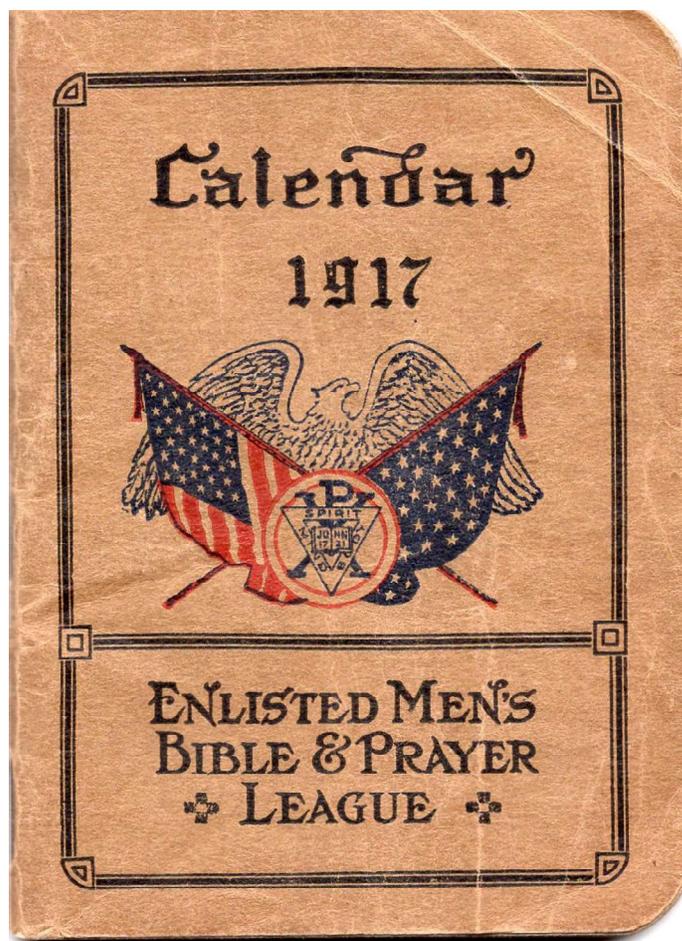
I am writing to you today because I am thinking about you a great deal. Bessie received a letter from you and in it you said you were well and it filled me with comfort, and you spoke about coming home for the first time. Dear Jim it will be one of the happiest days of my life when I see you again and Dear Brother Tom.

Dear Jim I suppose you know by this time of our great loss Bessie wrote and told you. I know it will be a great blow to you but Jim you know he was always a good boy and he has gone to his reward and he died for his Country and he will always live in our memory. I was with him before he died but he could not speak to me. I asked him if he knew me and he nodded his head that was all he could do but it was good to be near him and he lies beside his Grandmother and his Grandfather. He had a grand funeral the Bible class carried him and the Junior order covered him with flowers and they sang Nearer My God to Thee and I know he is in Heaven now singing with the Angels and now all we have to do now is to live so that we can join him in the skies. Bessie wrote and told Isabelle and I received a grand letter from her this morning. She wrote such a nice letter it certainly done me good. She said she got a letter three weeks ago from you so she said she was going to write you a letter of comfort. So Jim I want you to be a brave boy and keep up your good work so that you will soon be home again. David Phillips is back and he sent word to me that he mailed your letter.

Elizabeth's letter to her son James



Greeting card from Elizabeth to her son Private James Bruce



Private James Bruce's 1917 Calendar



Nov. 23, 1918.

Hoping you are in the best
of health and hope you enjoy
your Xmas. You have the won-
derful thought to know you will
be home for next Xmas, if it is
God's will -

To Jim:
From - Your loving
sister - Bessie.

XXXXXX

Greeting card from Bessie to her brother Private James Bruce

CONFIRMS DEATH OF PRIVATE BRUCE

Killed By Bursting Shell Com- rade Writes—Was Reported Missing.

Word has been received by Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Bruce, of 557 Main street, that their son, First Class Private James H. Bruce, of Company C, Sixth regiment United States engineers, who was reported missing in action since Oct. 17, was killed in action on that date. He is the second eldest son to give his life in the service of his country, the eldest son, Alexander, died at Camp Dix, Oct. 3. A third son is still in France with Base hospital, No. 116, medical corps. Private Bruce was twenty-two years old and a faithful member of the Westminster Presbyterian church.

The following letter was written to Mrs. Bruce by a Red Cross nurse, stationed at Debarkation hospital No. 3, New York city, writing in behalf of Private Eugene Willette, a member of Private Bruce's company:

"Eugene Willette, Floor 2, Ward 1, Bed 35.

"U. S. Debarkation Hospital No. 3, Sixth Avenue and Eighteenth Street, New York City, Feb. 18, 1919.

"Mrs. Thomas Bruce, 557 Main Street, Paterson, N. J.

"My Dear Mrs. Bruce:—Private Eugene Willette has asked me to answer your letter which he has just received. He regrets very much not to have any good news to send you. The company was in the Argonne forest, clearing up machine gun nests. Willette was standing near your son when he was hit by a shell, and he believes that without doubt your son was killed instantly. I am very sorry to have to send you this sad news, but is better for you to know definitely than to go on hoping against hope. Your son has given his life for a great cause and you must be very proud of him. You will be glad to hear that he was in excellent standing in the company and that they all thought a great deal of him. Willette tells me that he was as brave a man as you would ever run against. It is the highest tribute one brave man pays another. With the deepest sympathy for you in your great loss, believe me.

"Sincerely yours,

"HOME COMMUNICATION SERVICE AMERICAN RED CROSS.

"Per Edith B. Taylor."

1918 Newspaper article confirming James's death. Private Eugene Willette, who served with James Bruce, provides first-hand confirmation of her son's fate

185 Niagara St.

Newark, N.J.

March 4, 1919

Mrs. J. Bruce,

Dear Friend,

Just a few lines to let you know I received a letter which you sent to me while in France in regards to your Son's death but it is impossible for me to do so, as I was wounded on the 20th day of Oct and was taken back to a Hospital and never knew of the loss of James. The first I heard of it was the other day when I had mail from some of the boys in the Company and all they said was they knew he was missing in action which I was very sorry to hear.

As your letter reads, James was last heard of on the 17th day of October. It was but three days later when I was hit in the leg and when I reached the hospital they decided to send me home. I left France on the 19th day of December, 1918 and reached the U.S. on December 31st and was discharged from the Army on the 10th day of January 1919.

Now Dear Mrs. Bruce, I will do all in my power to get the real fact of James. I will write to the boys of the Company and they will tell me a lot more than the officials will tell you, then I will forward all news I can obtain to you. I am very sorry this letter did not reach me before this but the reason for the delay was my returning home. Now Mrs. Bruce don't take those official reports to heart to quick as I was reported lost in action three times while I was but wounded. I will close for the present and will forward you any information I can obtain.

I remain your Son's Real Friend

John J Callahan

105 Niagara St.

Newark, N.J.

March 24, 1919

My Dear Mrs. Bruce,

Your letter of March 11th was forwarded to me first from Green huts hospital and then from Camp Dix. I really don't know how I can express my deepest sympathy for you as I can realize how you must feel. I really can't relate much about your son's disappearance only from what I heard last about him. It was on the night of Oct. 18th that we were relieved from the front line trenches that someone secured him come out with the rest of the boys. The Trens must of known of this movement as they opened up with their artillery and landed amongst the boys. It was a very dark night and we couldn't recognize one from the other. Several of our boys were hit and due to the fact that the "barrage" was too fierce to do any assistance to those hit, we managed however to carry some back with us leaving three lying on the ground. All this happened in the back of our lines only about one quarter of a mile. We sent a squad of boys back very early the next morning to see who those were who we left behind as the barrage continued all night but the bodies couldn't be found and we concluded that some of our boys ran upon them and if they were alive sent them to a hospital. Jim was liked very much among the boys for he had a big heart and a nice way which pleased everybody. He was one of the old timers of the Company and therefore knew the boys quite well. Will endeavor to run up to see you with one of Jim's old friends Pvt. N. Heister of North Bergen. I can tell you more about him probably.

With deepest sympathy, I remain

Very Sincerely,

Walter Merteus

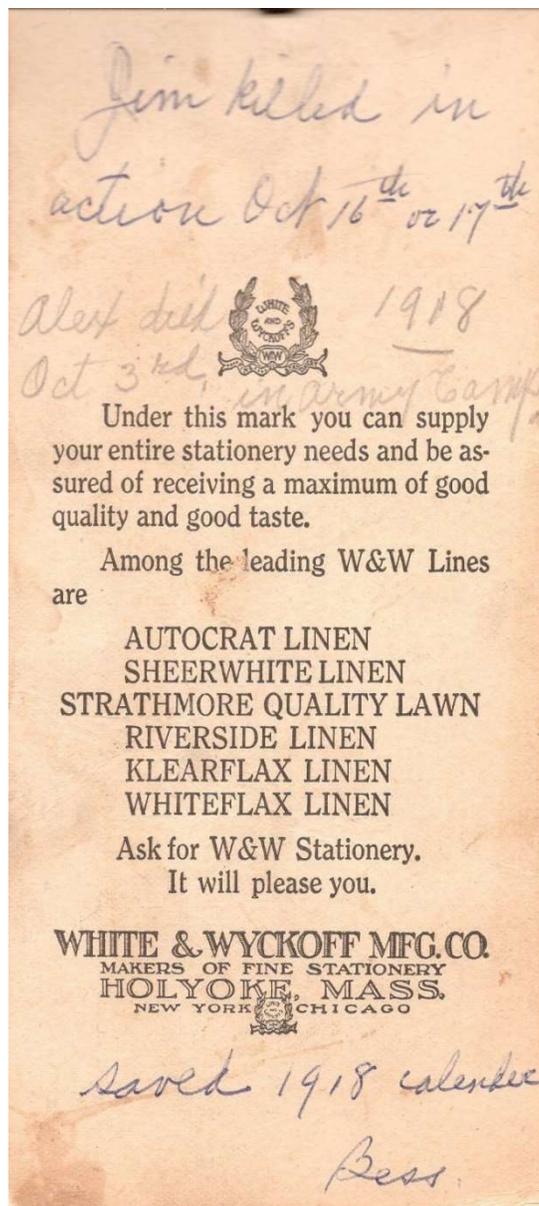
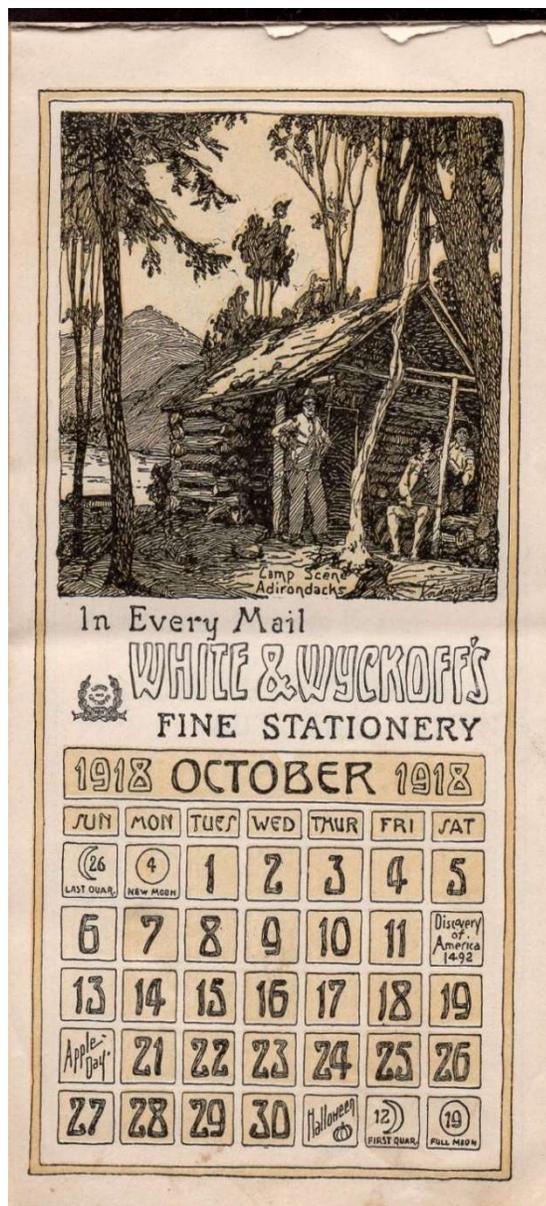
**Collection of two letters written to Elizabeth Bruce from members of Jim's Company.
Each letter is a response to her inquires of her son's whereabouts and wellbeing.**



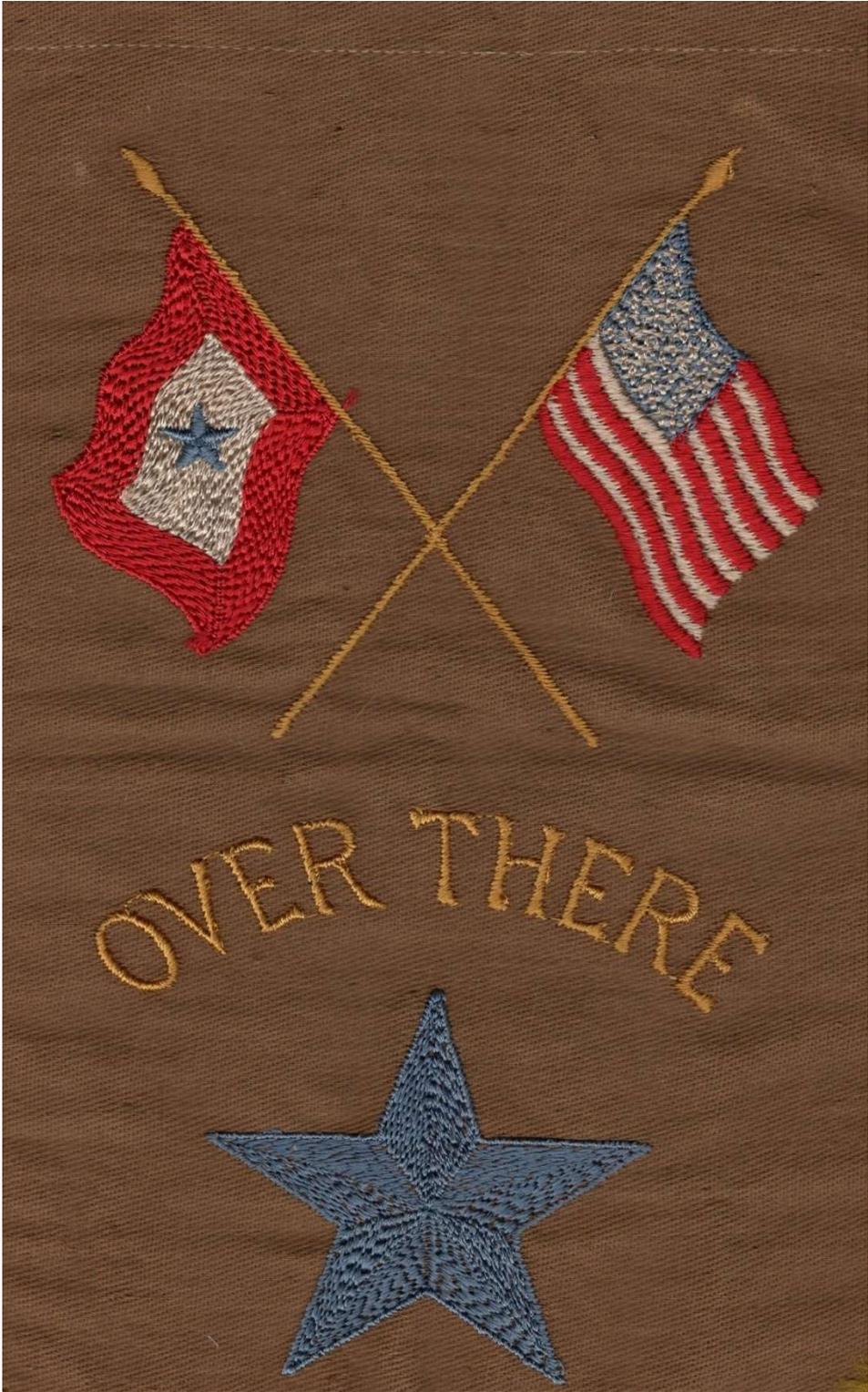
Mrs. Elizabeth Bruce's Mourning Armbands

Top armband with single gold star for her son Alexander

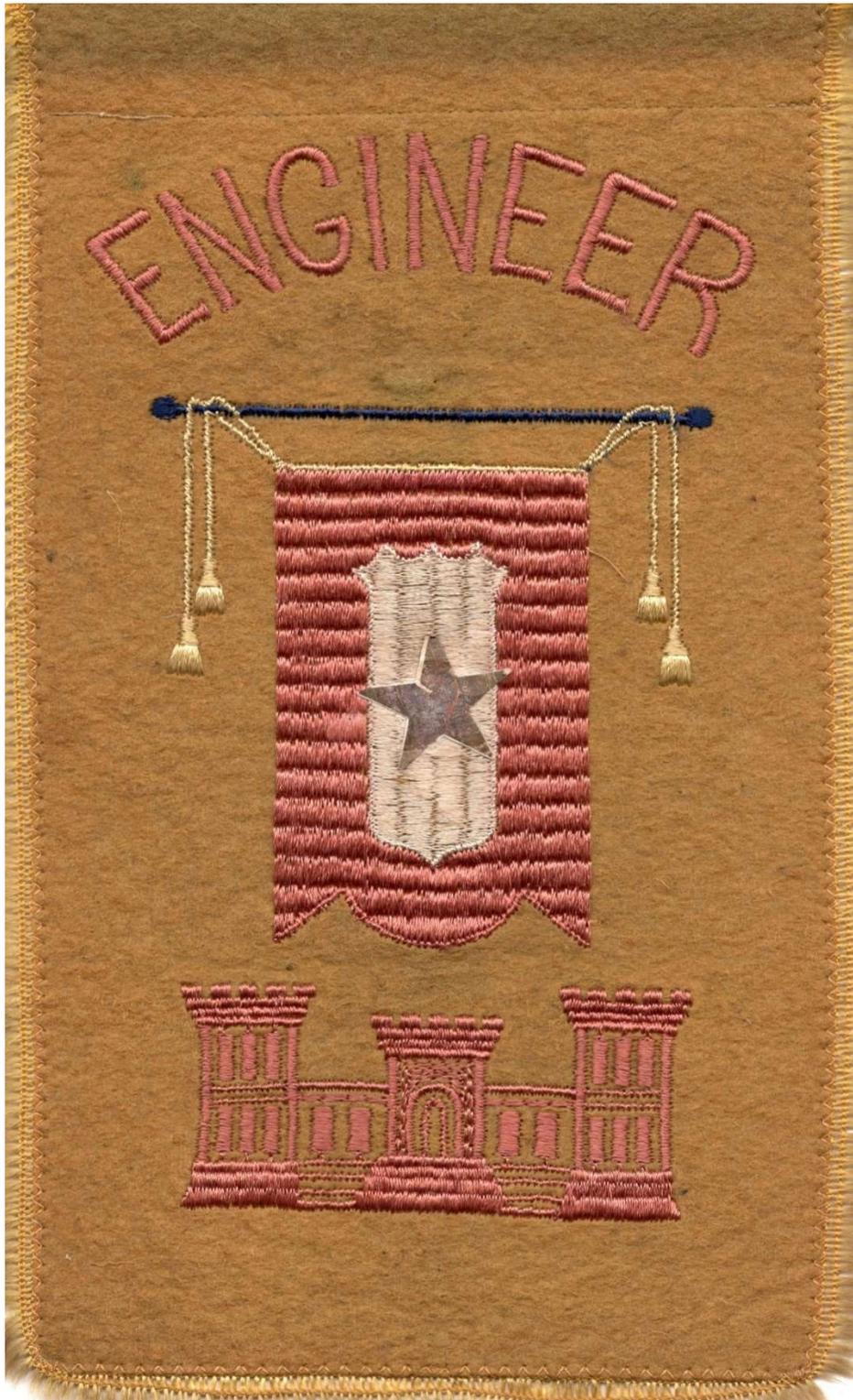
Bottom armband with two gold stars representing Alexander and James



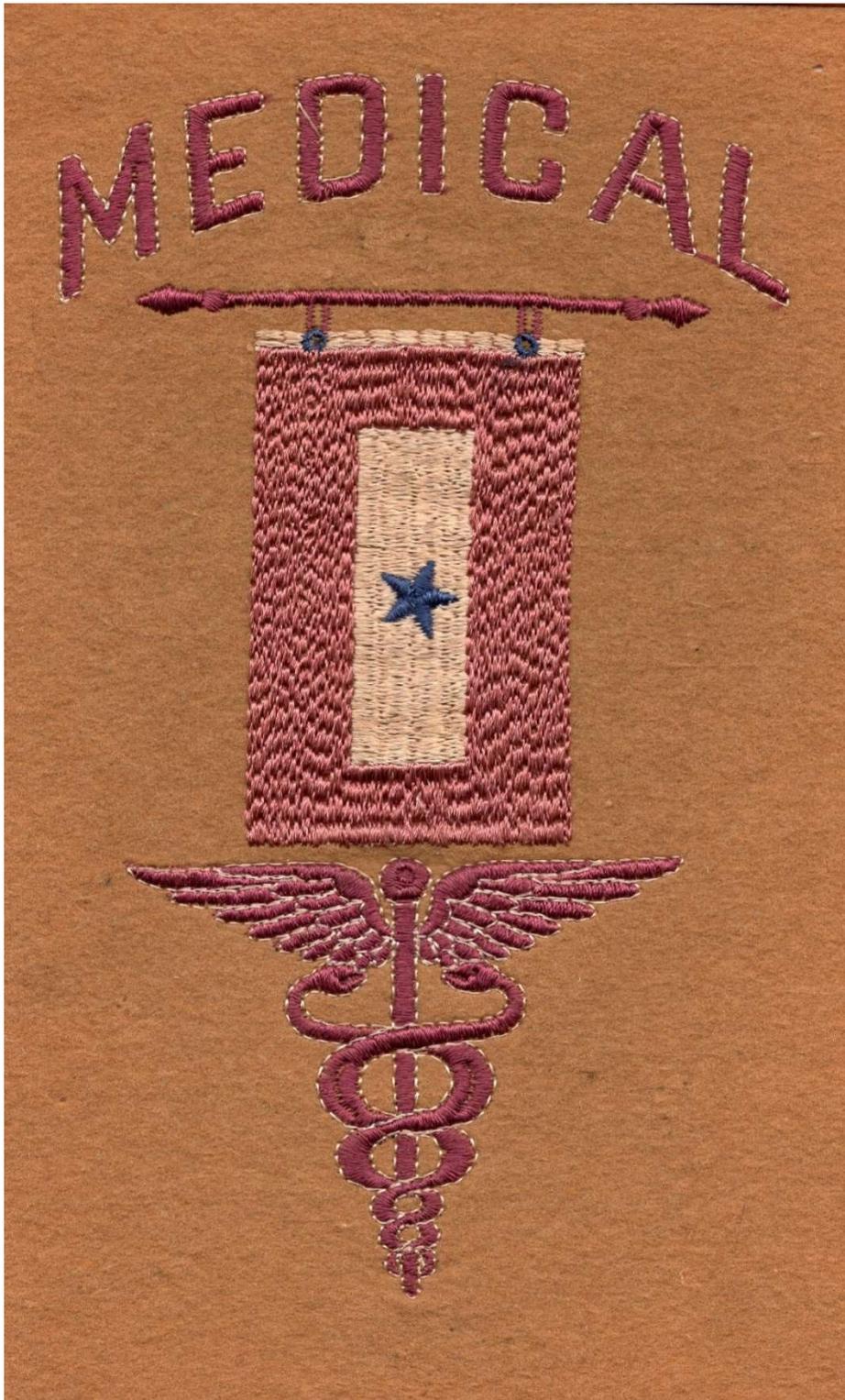
Bruce family calendar. The month of October remains which was the month both Alexander and James died two weeks apart



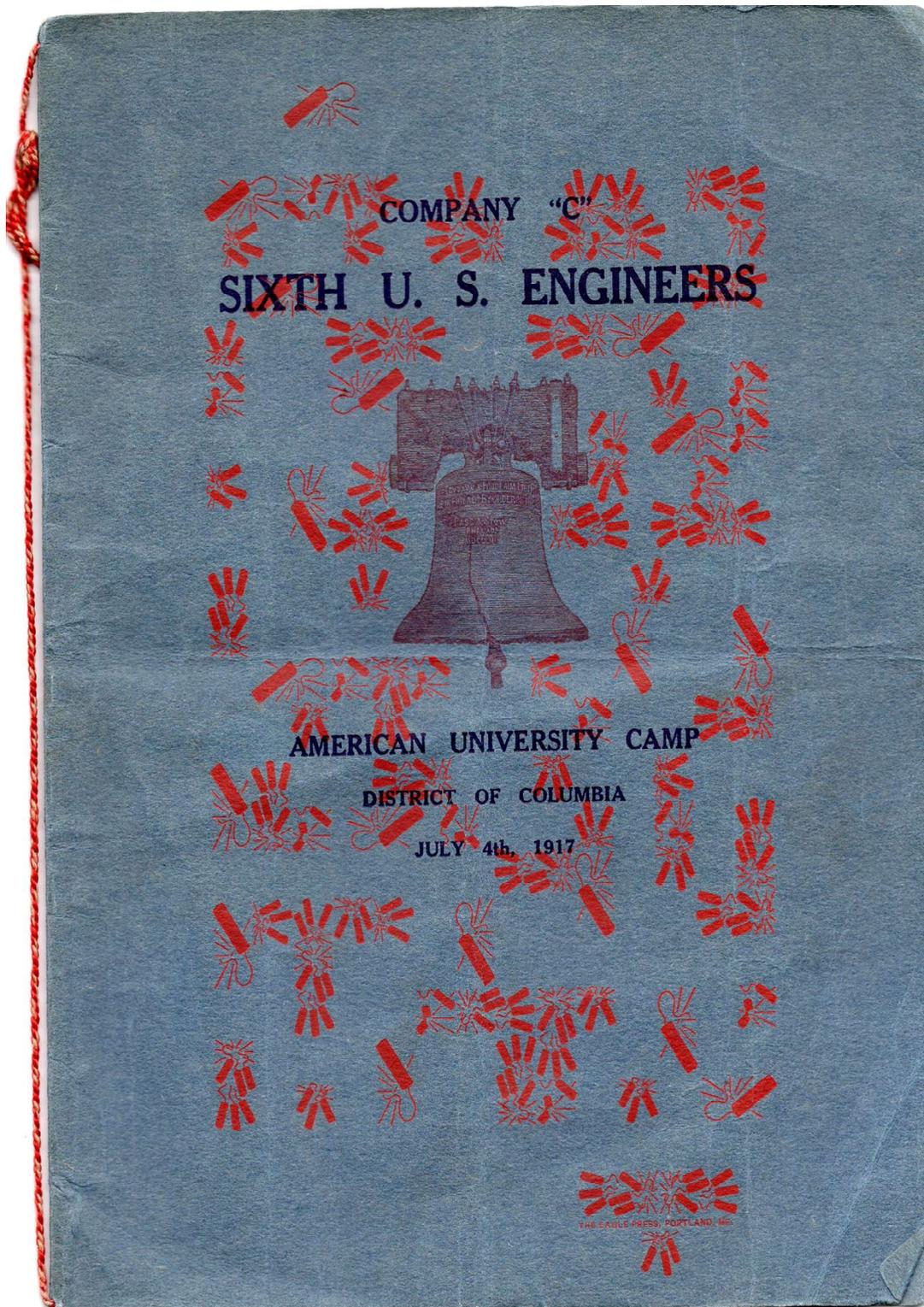
Elizabeth's Son in Service "Over There" flag



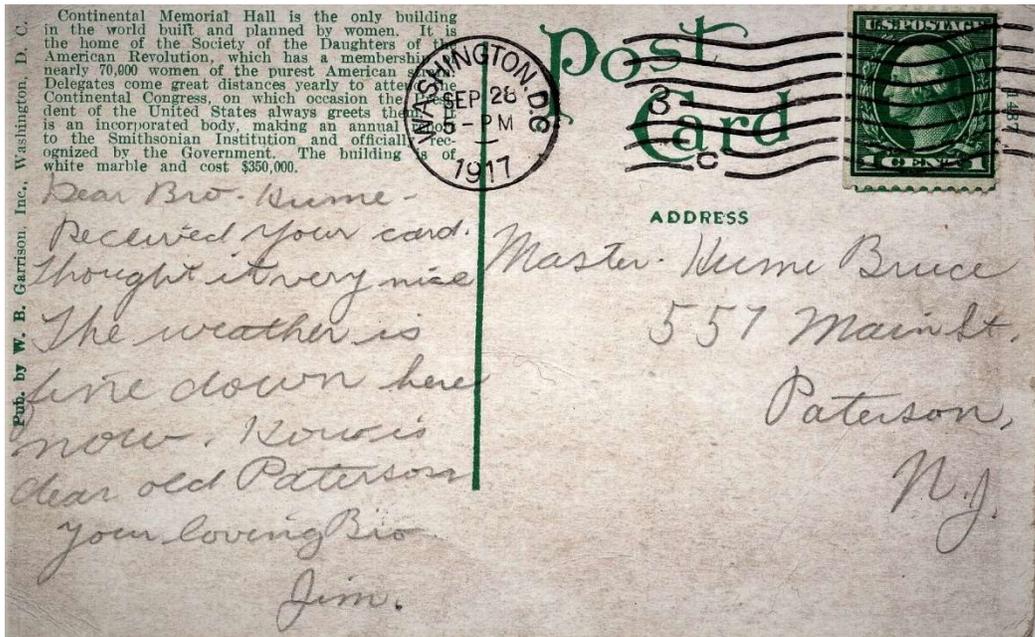
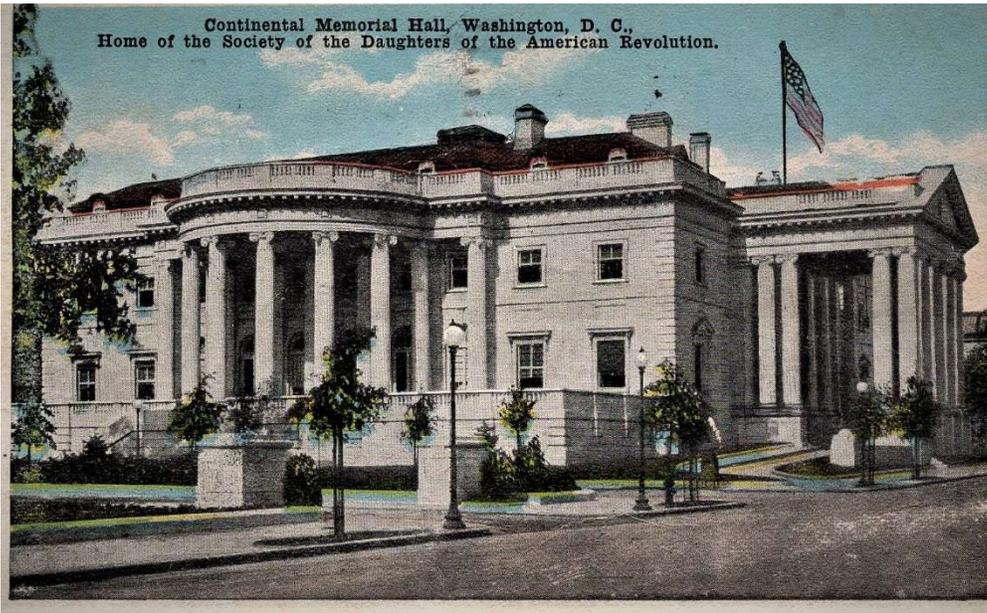
James Bruce Engineer Branch Service Flag



Thomas Bruce Jr. Medical Branch Service Flag



July 4th, 1917 Celebration pamphlet with roster of men from Company "C" and luncheon menu for picnic while Pvt. James Bruce was training at Camp American University, Washington, DC.



While training at Camp American University in Washington, DC, Private James Bruce sent this postcard to his brother back home in Patterson, NJ.

Application for Membership

American War Mothers

(Chartered by Special Act of Congress)

Mothers of Sons and Daughters, of her blood, who served in the Army or Navy of the United States or in the Military or Naval Service of its allies in the great World War at some time during the period between April 6, 1917, and November 11, 1918, both dates inclusive, having an honorable discharge or still in the service.

Date September 23, 1930

Name of applicant Elizabeth T. Bruce

Residence of applicant 175 North 9 St. Paterson, Passaic, N.J.
Street No. City County State

Name of Husband Thomas

Married at Paterson, Passaic, N.J. Month July 6, 1891
Town County State

Parents of Thomas Bruce Jr.
Son or Daughter

Facts concerning Son or Daughter in Service.

Born at Paterson Passaic N.J. Birthday Sept 16 1900
Town County State Month Year

Single yes Married _____
Yes or No. Yes or No.

If married, name of wife or husband _____

Born at _____ Birthday _____
Town County State Month Year

Married at _____ Wedding day _____

Branch of Service in the World War Medical Corps

Company Base Hospital #116 Regiment _____

Stationed at Bazouilles France

Discharged at Camp Dix, N.J. Month May 15, Year 1919

Living yes Dead _____ Date of Death _____

Cause of Death _____

Remarks: Also had two other sons, Alexander M. and James T. Bruce, who died in the World War. Alexander died at Camp Dix Oct. 3, 1918. James was killed in action on Oct. 17, 1918.

I am a Citizen of the United States, and certify that the above statements are true.

Name of Applicant Elizabeth T. Bruce

Notary George C. Kalle Address 175 N 9th St Paterson, N. J.
GEORGE C. KALLE
NOTARY PUBLIC, New Jersey
Commission expires April 7, 1932

Elizabeth Bruce's 1930 membership application into the American War Mothers

Dedication War Memorial



SUNDAY AFTERNOON
JULY 11, 1937

at
two of the clock

LAUREL GROVE
MEMORIAL PARK
TOTOWA BOROUGH - PATERSON

Cover of Leaflet for the 1937 dedication of the WWI War Memorial

Gold Star Mother Mrs. Elizabeth Bruce unveiled the memorial



1917 6th U.S. Engineers Banner- the Unit Private James Bruce served in

This banner is the only item not discovered in the Shoebox. While attending a small military collectible show in Illinois, I came upon a lady attending her booth. When I inquired about Service flags, she told me that she had none in her collection. Just as I began to walk away, she mentioned that there was some type of flag or banner in their storage containers, but that she didn't know where it was. After several minutes of searching, she pulled out this felt banner. The odds of finding this banner are impossible to calculate and when I told her the story of the Bruce family, she expressed that it was women's intuition that told her to show it to me.