



## AMERICAN RED CROSS

U.S. Army Base Hospital  
Camp Sherman, Ohio

Ward #44

Feb. 23<sup>rd</sup> 1919

My dear Ones:

We very often come across some of our friends in a very peculiar way, for instance while over there in a hospital, met a fellow soldier. We had enlisted in the same company, were in the same outfit most of the time. He had been gassed. We were in the same ward two weeks before noticing each other. Well when we did recognize one another what a meeting it was. Talked over the past experiences while in the States in training, in France in training, and on the firing line. A meeting of this kind certainly makes one feel a great deal better, somehow it seems to put new courage and new life in one.

We landed in **Brest**<sup>1</sup> the fifth of July, nineteen hundred – eighteen. About twenty out of our company were put on a detail with men from other companies of the regiment to pile boxes of supplies up in great piles at the warehouses. These were several blocks walk from the docks where the boxes were being unloaded and brot (brought) to us into trucks. Did we work! The answer is spelled with capitals Y.E.S. This detail did not leave the ship until about midnight or morning of July sixth. We began to work about two-thirty a.m. This was Saturday morning. Worked from then until about eight a.m. Sunday, with only time off to eat, now and then. You could slip a little time off to yourself but woe unto you if the officer in charge caught you loafing. From then up until about two p.m. we loafed, or slept around the warehouses, on the ground or any place we could find. Then several large trucks came after us to take us to the camp several miles from the city. Here the regiment had gone immediately after landing. At last we arrived at the camp. Some camp to (too). While in enroute, the truck we were in cut in ahead of a street car and we went about a square when the engine got hot. Had to stop and get water from a fire hydrant close at hand. By this time the street car had caught up with us. We blocked it for about fifteen minutes. The people along the streets cheered and

greeted us, all seemed glad that we had arrived, not just the few in the trucks but all the American soldiers. After arriving at the camp we found some water and took a good wash, the first we had for several days. Then after chow, took a stroll along the roads. Women and girls were selling oranges and nuts at very good prices. At this camp are great stone barracks which Napoleon had built. It was being used as a prison where German Officers and soldiers were imprisoned. When we went after drinking water, had to take two canteens and a cup. The line usually was a square or so long. Monday morning rolled around. It came to quick. More details. I was a lucky bird. Was put on a detail that went to the waterfront down in the city. We hauled or pushed wheel barrows of stone out of the bay while the tide was out. Say we were glad when the tide came in. I was then sent over with nine other men to help unload steel rails, which were brot (brought) from the docks by trucks. This was not so bad for a half dozen or so would work on a rail. While working, little children, women young and old came along with oranges and nuts for sale and often times with newspapers. Such things as these made one think something of what war really means. Some of the sights a person seen before going to firing line were enough to make anyone with a real heart want to fight Kultur<sup>2</sup>. We only staid (stayed) here several days then order(ed) to move to another place.

This trip was made by rail. We traveled in third class cars. These cars are made in compartment of eight in each section. There are two seats, one on each end of compartment. A door on either side, also a window in the door. We passed then numerous towns and cities. At one place we stopped was a big supply camp. Here the Red Cross gave us coffee and sandwiches. We were here several hours. Enjoyed the stay very much. We gave a parade in one town, the name of which I never learned. At last we came to a small place, a good ways from somewhere. Here we (?nd) unloaded after being on the train about three days. We got some coffee and hardtack<sup>3</sup>, then started for our town. Our company was in the rear of the line. The three other companies of our battalion were ahead of us. We marched about two kilometers = 5/8 of mile, coming to a small town. Here the first of three companies of our battalion were billeted. Our company had to march on for several more kilometers, coming to Rozieres (Rosières?)<sup>4</sup>. Here were were billeted, some in the French homes, some of us in barracks, just about two squares from the center of town. The first thing we did here was to get brooms, rakes, shovels, anything to work with, no matter the condition, from the French people. Then what did we do?

We cleaned the streets, put them in a number one shape. On Sunday, July fourteenth, the French people celebrated their Independence as we do on the fourth. Our company gave a parade. The French and American Flags floating with the breeze at the head of the column. After the parade, we went to the square. Here a number of French citizens were gathered. Our Captain gave a short but inspiring speech. We sang a number of popular American songs which the French could not understand but never the less seemed to enjoyed them greatly, especially did they enjoy, "Goodbye Broadway, Hello France." We did squads, right and left, skirmishes, platoon movements, bayonet and rifle practice, for about three weeks. We received orders that we were to soon move on, so were issued gas mask, helmet, a belt of ammunition, which we had to carry with our rifle and bayonet while at drill. Bot (bought) some butter here. It was one dollar or five Francs a pound. Eggs were five Francs per dozen. A small bar of chocolate, something that would cost ten of fifteen cents in the States cost thirty to fifty cents. Could by (buy) a big cup of milk for five cents, and it was good. Often while here had bread and milk. Would save the bread from the meal. Bath tubs were not in style, would have to bathe in the creek which ran at the edge of town. One day the company went to rifle range which was quite a hike from town. It was my luck to be put in charge (of) barracks, and to (?) clean them up. Well I made no kick for I was glad to get out of the hike.

The washing is done in public wash houses. These usual(ly) contain several concrete tanks, probably fifteen feet long, several feet wide, and a (of couple of feet deep). The water comes from a spring, or is piped, it is running water all the time. The women gather here with their washings, beat the clothing with wooden paddles. Some places they wash in the creeks or streams. At these towns they have no concrete or stone wash houses. If you think this is an easy way to wash, try it. About the twenty-fourth of July we were ordered to move out of Rozieres. We left there about ten o'clock that night, hiked with full equipment to train which was something like four kilometers. Here we were loaded into box cars marked with HOMMES 40 CHEVEAN 5, otherwise read forty men or five horses. We traveled this way until the next morning. Then we unloaded and found we were in **Gurbervilla**. From here we had to hike something in the neighborhood of sixteen kilometers, some hot(had) to travel. This town was pretty badly shot up. We passed a number of towns before arriving at our destination **Dompstad** (Darmstadt?). Most of us were about all in when we arrived here. We had a hot supper, that helped a great deal. We were only

here several days, but didn't waste any time. Drilled from early in the morning till late at night. Again we were on the march, but this time did not have to carry packs. They were hauled by trucks to our bad luck, of which you will here (hear) in a short while. We started out about nine-thirty in the (?) evening and hiked up until midnight. We came to a woods. Here we were ordered to camp, and now it began to rain. Our packs with rain coats were on the trucks which did not arrive until the next morning, Saturday. Talk about looking like drowned rats. We sure looked the part. After getting our packs, we put up our pup tents. Two others and myself made our tent together. We staid (stayed) here until Sunday night. Then away we hiked from nine-thirty until one (o'clock) Monday morning. The roads were muddy and the (?) (?) was dark. Could see flare lights or signal lights all the way. That sure we were going into the trenches that night but instead we were billeted in **Hubervilla**. The platoon I was in was all billeted in one house #42. The room I was in was to have accommodations for eight men. There were nine of us. I decided to sleep in the window. Instead of a wooden sill as we have, they have a stone sill about two feet wide. I got to sleep about two o'clock, and did not wake until called the next morning at eleven. We were around this place several weeks. I worked in the officers mess, or rather had charge of what little there was to be in charge of. Would go over to a little town about an hours walk for different supplies we could get of(f) the French people. Always you would find women or girls in charge of the stores.

To be continued. Will write some more when again in the humor of writing.

Sincerely your loving Brother,

Robert H Pence

<sup>1</sup> Brest, France - a city in the Finistère département in Brittany in northwestern France.

<sup>2</sup> Kultur – (culture) "civilization as conceived by the Germans" (especially their own), a word common from the First World War and used ironically.

<sup>3</sup> Hardtack - a simple type of cracker or biscuit, made from flour, water, and sometimes salt. Inexpensive and long-lasting, it was and is used for sustenance in the absence of perishable foods, commonly during long sea voyages and military campaigns.

<sup>4</sup> Rosières, France