

A Guide to World War I American Soldiers' Correspondence and Diaries 1917-1919

World War I American Soldiers' Correspondence and Diaries 1917-1919
1917-1919

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Abstract

This addition to the Joseph M. Brucoli Great War Collection chiefly consists of the correspondence of four soldiers of the American Expeditionary Force, 1917-1919, and 1961 and undated, including Sergeant Major John Bleimeyer, Private Greg N. Auger, Corporal D. Fowler Campbell, Captain M.B.S. Fleisher, and the diary of Private T.H. Franklin, Jr. Other material pertaining to Sergeant Major John Bleimeyer includes printed material, post cards, and the Liberty Masonic Club By-laws and minutes (John Bleimeyer, secretary).

Physical Characteristics

290 items (2 Hollinger boxes)

Repository

Special Collections, University of Virginia Library

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

Use Restrictions

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Scope and Content Information

Correspondence of John Bleimeyer

John G. Bleimeyer of Brooklyn, New York, was a sergeant major in Headquarters Company, 302nd Engineers, 77th Division, A.E.F. who did not arrive in France in time to see much military action. His letters describe general news, various entertainments, special meals, and other related activities. Bleimeyer was stationed at Camp Upton, New York, before his departure overseas on the ship *Carmania* just before Easter. On the voyage, he mentions seeing several submarines on the way to Liverpool (1918 Apr 12), one of which fired a torpedo and hit a nearby battleship according to a later letter (1918 Nov 24).

Other topics mentioned in his letters include: billeting in a barn in France and his transfer to the Headquarters Company (1918 Apr 19); a reference to President's Wilson's peace efforts (1918 May 4); description of a Fourth of July celebration in France (1918 [Jul?] 5); his appointment as acting regimental sergeant major and subsequent promotion to regimental sergeant major (1918 Jul 28, Sep 4); horseback riding ([1918?] Jul 31); sending a German hat home as a souvenir from a battlefield (1918 Aug 30); the surrender of Bulgaria (1918 Oct 4); the discovery of a German home-made bowling alley without the pins or balls near a farm in the French countryside and several hurdles for steeplechase horse racing (1918 Nov 2); the rapid liberation of French villages (1918 Nov 10); the signing of the Armistice (1918 Nov 11); rumors concerning the spread of Spanish influenza (1918 Nov 15); a detailed itinerary of his tour of duty to date, including the Flanders front and the St. Pol front (1918 Nov 24); the 92nd "colored" Division ordered to join the Army of Occupation in Germany (1919 Jan 17); a description of a celebration (1919 Jan 19); a description of a marble factory at Sable (1919 Feb 18); the visit of General Pershing to the 77th Division (1919 Feb 25); and soldiers taking courses at Sable to pass the time while waiting to go home (1919 Mar 5).

Correspondence & Diary of Private Greg N. Auger

These letters were all written from Greg N. Auger of Dixon, Illinois, while serving in France to his wife, "Yare," in the United States. Auger began his service in Company "I" 337th Infantry, but was transferred to Headquarters Company, Classification Camp, 85th Division, in September 1918. His typewritten diary furnishes additional and more explicit details about his service and movements while in the Army. Subjects mentioned in his letters include: waiting to be shipped out from Camp Mills, Long Island (1918 Jul 15, 17, 20); his good impressions of England, and his appreciation for the work of the Red Cross and the Y.M.C.A. on behalf of the soldiers (1918 Aug 4); the first receipt of mail since his arrival in France (1918 Aug 25); primitive bathroom facilities and a request for the World Series baseball scores (1918 Sep 1); French farmers' markets (1918 Sep 14); his present location at the Chateau de Tracy built in 1421, his attempts to learn

French, and the move to Pouilly sur Loire (1918 Sep 23); reading Robert W. Service poems (1918 Oct 19); his bunk mate ill with "Spanish flu" (1918 Nov 16); the "flu" prevalent in France (1918 Nov 17); their concern over each other's health, the thirty day delay between the arrival of letters, his location at Toul, permission given to reveal his route through France (1918 Nov 24); his chief job has been handing out pants to soldiers (1918 Dec 14); and his transfer to the Supply Company, 2nd Army Provisional Regional Replacement Depot, eating a huge Christmas dinner with Ollie's company, [John Oliver?], and a description of the things Ollie had made out of parts of German airplanes (1918 Dec 28).

Subjects in letters from 1919 include: the monotony of waiting to come home and the general impatience of troops with delays in demobilization (Jan 3 & 7); mention that the only time he was near the front was when he was at Maron (Jan 22); all the shows are composed of military material which he is not interested in watching (Jan 28); receipt of a fourteen day pass to Dijon and his application for Separation from the Service due to the health of his wife (Feb 14); the soldier's lack of enthusiasm for Salvation Army services and the popularity of their chow lines (Mar 4); a description of war souvenirs sent home (Mar 12); his move to the Headquarters Company, 2nd Army Replacement Depot (Mar 15); news that Grover Cleveland Alexander (1887-1950), a favorite baseball player, was on the way home from France in time for spring training (Mar 23); hearing that Margaret Wilson, the President's daughter, sang for the troops at the Y.M.C.A. (Mar 29); and notification that his application for an early discharge was approved and his expectation of arriving home in three weeks (Mar 30).

Diary Summary of Greg N. Auger

1918

May 26 -- Arrival at Camp Custer

May 26-Jul 12 -- Drilling and training at Camp Custer

Jul 12 -- left for Camp Mills, Long Island, arriving on July 14

Jul 14-21 -- waiting to be shipped out

Jul 21 -- left the U.S. aboard the British steamship *Nevasa* manned by East Indians

Jul 22-Aug 3 -- the voyage overseas, bad food, and submarine alarms

Aug 2 -- German subs attacked the ships off the coast of Ireland, defended by the British fleet

Aug 3 -- landed at Liverpool, England

Aug 4 -- at Winchester, England

Aug 5 -- at Southampton, England

Aug 6 -- Germans torpedoed a hospital ship which sank losing 700 wounded soldiers

Aug 7 -- started over the English Channel on board the *Nepatin* but the boiler exploded causing the return of the ship; later cross on board the S.S. *St. George* bound for Le Havre, France

Aug 8 -- arrival at Le Havre

Aug 9-11 -- train ride through Rouen, Versailles, Orleans, arriving at Cosne, participated in the theft and drinking of a keg of the choicest vermouth

Aug 12-14 -- drilling on low rations of food and water

Aug 12-30 -- measles quarantine

Sep 15 -- transfer to Headquarters Company, Classification Camp, located at Chateau de Tracy

Oct 1-30 -- moved back to Cosne to build a new camp

Oct 30-Nov 2 -- riding in a Pierce Arrow truck as part of an advance party bound for the Toul sector, near the front at Maron

Nov 8 or 9 -- left Maron for Domgermain to classify and equip casualties

Nov 15 -- move to the Thauvenot Barracks at Toul, France

Dec 25 -- Christmas dinner with Ollie, Captain Simpson now his commanding officer

1919

Feb -- concern over the health of his wife "Yare"

Feb 26 -- lost his job in the supply room, now a Private First Class

Mar 29 -- lack of news about his application to return home on an early discharge

Correspondence of Corporal D. Fowler Campbell

These letters were written by Campbell to his mother, father, and sister in Boston, chiefly while he was a member of the Headquarters Company, 51st Brigade, 26th Division, of the 101st Artillery.

Topics in letters from 1917 include: during the trip overseas he asks his family to send two pounds of sugar and a couple of cartons of Lucky Strike cigarettes (Sep 10); sleeping in bathtubs filled with straw on his arrival in France (Oct 16); his walks to a small village and purchase of fruit and dinner; rats are regular visitors during the night when they run track meets along the floor (Oct 17); his transfer from the scout section to the wireless (Oct 21); the arrival of horses and the demonstration of horsemanship by a friend who broke a wild horse (Nov 18); in a censored letter, he describes his pass to [Paris ?] where he saw a great variety of soldier uniforms and French colony soldiers; and the government issue of his hip rubber boots and tin hat (Nov 21); discussion concerning the election of Boston's mayor, Thanksgiving in France, and his present position 300 miles away from the front (Dec 2); his trip to a seacoast port to help with the Christmas mail at [Rennes ?], his description of his train escapades with a French conductor, and his good opinion of the American marines (Dec 9); visits to the theater, opera, hotels, & cafes (Dec 21); and a reference to the war work of wealthy women at the Y.M.C.A. (Dec 27).

Letters written during 1918 include the following subjects: writing from the Base Hospital # 6 of the Massachusetts General Hospital (Jan 9); his transfer to the Army Transport Service (Jan 15); Campbell's return to his old regiment in Paris and his sight-seeing (Jan 25, 27); his quarters in a stable in a small town while on billeting detail and seeking quarters for the regiment (Jan 31, Feb 2); now living in the trenches; witnessing air raids, airplane battles and the destruction by the Germans (Feb 17); trip to Le Mans as part of the 26th Division, in a review by General Pershing (Feb 22); application for transfer to the Army Transport Service, and notes that several American infantrymen have received the "Croix de Guerre" medal (Mar 7); problems with lice (Mar 10); and the regiment has left the trenches and gone to a rest billet, traveling through a wheat region, Campbell in a car with horses and one other soldier, visited a chateau in a city of 2,000 and lost his souvenirs and kit on the trip (Mar 20).

His letters continue with a description of his regiment returning to the front, when a wild boar chased by dogs ran through their marching column, being shaved by a French lady barber, April first jokes played along the route, a visit to a walled town with a canal and moat around it, a sighting of a German Observation Balloon, marching through the deep mud, Campbell performing guard duty at the supply wagon after his unit reached their destination, and a description of the next day's hike to their dugouts under the view of the Germans in the hills, who would send over a barrage of high explosives and gas causing the soldiers to have to wear masks quite often (Apr 16); description of life in the cave dugouts (Apr 19); gas warfare and dugouts (Apr 20); his last quarters in mule stables, the frequent movements of troops, and jokes about the rodent and lice problems (Apr 21); description of feet inspections, recent receipt of an identification number and dog tags (Apr 22); presently a member of the first battalion detachment of the company, which is a mobile detachment and always on the go, constant trouble with lice, and his daily sponge bath with water that has collected in shell holes (Apr 25); feeding crumbs to the birds (Apr 28); the Y.M.C.A. sponsored talent show at the front, and the chaplain's instructions to write a letter to their mothers in honor of Mother's Day (May 5); his reference to the war work of his mother and sister at home in Boston, the "zoo kept in the middle of camp consisting of a wild boar, foxes, porcupines, and an owl," and notification he was to go to the trenches as an observer (May 12).

Campbell's letters continue with a description of his work as an observer, watching for new developments behind the German lines and for rockets at night, using equipment called "scissors" with an extension at a right angle for peering over the tops of the trenches, mentioning the book *Over the Topy* Arthur Guy Empey describing life at an observation point, patronizing a delousing machine which visited a nearby town where they had their clothes and blankets sterilized and living behind six feet of concrete which recently took a direct hit of a "big boy" (May 15 & 20); the use of their tin hats as candlesticks at night, feeling the earth move when the shells leave the German artillery, and the ferocity of Senegalese troops (May 19);

descriptions of bombardment and aerial battles near the front, mention of his appreciation for the work of the Salvation Army and the Red Cross distribution of summer underwear (Jun 2); on observation point duty at the front again, viewing of a moving picture which was the first cinema seen by many of the local French people, young French women putting up the hay crop caused quite a few American soldiers to volunteer to help them, the town where he was stationed located on the banks of a river, the difficulty of moving horses by train, and his movement from chateau to chateau until present at the front on O.P. duty again (Jun 7); his observation and liaison work with the infantry, living in dugouts, his present company a "melting pot" of European nations, and the delousing and bathing procedure (Jun 9); his letter written from land just recently reclaimed from Germany for the first time since August 1914 as a result of a great victory [Belleau Wood?], and eating from a captured German rolling kitchen (Jun 13 & Sep 2); rodent problems while in the forests and a baseball game between the officers and the enlisted men (Jun 17); noted that he had worked as an observer in the front lines with the infantry for two months without a break and a description of a barrage at the front (Jun 24); and the news that the Headquarters Company is split into five or six detachments and his swim in the [Meuse River?] (Jun 30).

The remainder of his letters in 1918 discuss: the movement from trench warfare to open warfare, living in a fox hole (6 x 4 x 3), eating only bread and bacon, and his bed of straw with his pup tent over the top of the foxhole (2 letters, Jul 11); reports on the progress of the American infantry against the enemy (Jul 19); achievement of a year's service and a description of an aerial battle (Jul 28); after a period of rest, Campbell is now in another sector and back into the army routine in the "zone of advance" against the Germans (Sep 11 & 22); the death of Jack Follen (Oct 5); acting as a courier for the adjunct's office (Oct 10 & 25); explains his demotion from corporal to private by a different "click" of sergeants, volunteering for K.P. duty to avoid the sergeants, his court-martial for refusing to groom a vicious horse and the fine of three months pay, and his return to the front during the past week (Oct 26); presently billeted in the small town of Culey, France, in a barn and his enjoyment of the Thanksgiving dinner (Nov 29); his pass to Bar-le-Duc (Dec 3); the record of his 26th Division which has taken part in 42 battles, including all American battles, with the 51st Brigade receiving fourteen citations (Dec 4); the 101st Regiment was at Belleau Woods at the point of the salient at the toughest fighting (Dec 6); formerly at Verdun (Dec 11); and his belief that the Y.M.C.A. neglected his 26th Division (Dec 13).

Letters written in 1919 discuss the following: stationed at Varennes sur Amance waiting to go home (Jan 1-19); stationed at Mayet, France, and the football tournament of the A.E.F. troops (Jan 26); the production of "Headquarters Company Minstrel Troops" which appears to be the most common form of entertainment for the troops performed by themselves and the football tournament (Feb 2); rumors they are soon to be en route to the Le Mans embarkation camp (Feb 4 & 9); the wild boar hunt (Feb 13); on furlough to Le Mans, Paris, Lyon, Nice, Dijon, France, and touring a little of Italy and Monaco, probably will be home in April (Feb 27 & Mar 9); and a telegram to Mrs. J.A. Campbell informing her of Fowler Campbell's arrival at Dorchester, Massachusetts, and his destination of Camp Devens (Apr 10).

Diary summary of Private T.H. Franklin, Jr.

This diary was written from memory after September 28, 1918, in a brief shorthand style by Private T.H. Franklin, Jr., a member of the United States Infantry, concerning his activities in the Great War, April to September 1918.

Apr 16 -- left Brooklyn, New York aboard the *Vauban*, cook was fired last thing before leaving shore so food is poor, and the accompanying British destroyer sunk two subs

Apr 28 -- arrival at Liverpool, England, at the Mersey River, and arrival in London by midnight

Apr 29 -- at Oil Mill Barracks, Dover, England, where the entrance to the harbor is protected by a net

Apr 30 -- crossing the English Channel; heard the sound of bombardment on the Belgian coast; landing at Calais; hike to Rest Camp # 2

May 16 -- left Licques; arrival at Zougnaffs; billeted in a brewery; slept in a sheep corral

May 17 -- continued hike to Watten; air raid

May 29 -- at a rifle range near Norduques

May 31 -- hiked to Herbinghen

Jun 2 -- presently with Friedman, a regiment runner; three days of good grub and no rats

Jun 4 -- return of his company

Jun 5 -- ride as a guide on the British laury [lorry ?]

Jun 6 -- arrival at Champagne

Jun 9 -- worked as a runner

Jun 10 -- arrived at Hesdin and got aboard cattle cars which traveled towards Bologne

Jun 11 -- crossing the Seine River; served coffee at Versailles; traveled past Vichy; and entered the American sector at Toul, France

Jun 12 -- Charmes-Chartel

Jun 13 -- description of the hamlet of St. Genest

Jun 18 -- left St. Genest and marched to ["B" Company Headquarters ?]

Jun 22 -- inspection by General Pershing and air raids

Jun 24 -- left for Pettonville; assigned as Platoon runner; billeted in the woods; and an airplane "duel"

Jul 2 -- left the woods for the delousing station; wait at Migneville

Jul 4 -- celebration of the Fourth; pass to Baccarat

Jul 11 -- pulled out of Glonville; new location described as "big billet, lots of rats"; under German observation; swam in the Verdette River

Jul 20 -- moved forward into the woods; enjoyed the 37th Division's good grub

Aug 2 -- told he was going to an active front; gas alarms; rifle shots

Aug 3 -- arrival at Fontenoy

Aug 7 -- get a telegram to visit Paris

Aug 10 -- passed through Chateau-Thierry; saw wrecked towns & woods; gas alarms

Aug 12 -- marched to the front

Aug 12-Sep 14 -- active battle described; gas attacks; snipers; shelling; and airplane attacks (pages 31-49)

Sep 14-20 -- relieved from active duty and marched to Tours Sur Marne forest and other towns

Sep 21 -- returned to the woods and the front

Sep 26-28 -- active battle described again; machine gunner hit; very fierce trench warfare and barrage from the Germans

Sep 28 -- wounded by a German shell; taken to a first aid station and then to an ambulance which he rode under shell fire to a monastery; then went to a shock ward (pages 49-51); had surgery and was moved by train to the new Base Hospital # 8 at Chatol; and another train ride to Nantes; on page 54 is a map showing the location of artillery, etc. near Herbeviller

Correspondence of Captain M.B.S. Fleisher

M.B.S. Fleisher ("Shorty") was a dentist from New York City who addressed his letters to Miss Madeline M. Mayer, also a New Yorker. During the time covered by most of these letters, January 1918-April 1919, Fleisher's served as a 1st Lieutenant with the 6th U.S. Infantry. In the beginning letters, he was stationed at the Base Hospital, Camp Gordon, near Atlanta, Georgia.

Topics in Fleisher's letters in 1918 include: his leading all other doctors in numbers of patients treated for the month of December in spite of the fact his treatment usually involved fillings rather than extractions, the

bustle of preparing to travel overseas, the request for him to contribute an article, "The Saving of Soldier's Teeth," for the *Army & Navy Dentist Journal*, his visit to Fort MacPherson where the U.S. government kept German prisoners, allowing them to play football and paying them for their labor (Jan 11); saw 16,000 men of the division commanded by General Burnhem leave for overseas duty at midnight and noted that sixteen men died last week from measles and pneumonia (Jan 27); presently with the 6th U.S. Infantry, Camp Forrest, Military Brigade, Chattanooga, Tennessee; in preparation for departing overseas, he is very busy giving physical examinations to all the men who are in two groups, at camp and at the rifle range twenty-two miles away at Catoosa Springs. He traveled to Catoosa Springs on horseback, examined all mouths present, and accompanied by 800 men of the 6th Infantry, saw a raging forest fire on the way back. Their advance guard known as the billeting officers had previously left for France on Monday to select proper billets for the men of the regiment (Mar 1). They received news that their special billeting detachment made it safely to France and then he tells how a prisoner trying to escape was shot at their camp by a sentry (Mar 17).

While in France, Fleisher writes about the progress of the war, the tragedy of the patrol commanded by Captain R.H. Graham, which was challenged by a German string post, fired upon with guns and grenades, and resulted in the death of Graham who urged his men on as he was dying (Aug 8); the success of the new offensive against the Germans, treatment of soldiers from 4 a.m. through the next day, 20 hours on his feet and forty-eight without sleep (Aug 21); his transfer from the regiment to the field hospital not as a dentist and oral surgeon but as an anesthetist, his probable return to the front after his period of rest as part of the hospital 5th Sanitary Train (Sep 5); stationed in the woods near Verdun with the temperature at 15 degrees above zero, in a pup tent with the mud almost knee deep, hasn't been able to wash his hands or face for four days (Oct 9); spent the night in a German dugout and writing on paper left by another regiment (Oct 20).

Following the Armistice, he writes: on the day the Armistice was signed his regiment had advanced furthest across the River Meuse, he was almost killed by shells dropped by the enemy after one of their planes with Allied markings flew over Brandyville checking the town for any Allied troops, talks about the appalling stories he has heard from French civilians about German behavior, especially the German work details for children, old men and women, and German treatment of their P.O.W.s and his pride in being an American and part of the liberating force (Nov 24); now on garrison duty in Trier, Germany, the 6th Regiment having led the whole American force into Germany on November 26, on the third day of the march it arrived at Luxembourg, entering German territory again on December 1, noting that Trier had only 200 Jews, 1,000 Protestants, and the remainder were Catholics, "The Jews are few and far between and even if we do find one it is hard to get him to admit it because of the great prejudice that exists" (Dec 8); Christmas celebration at Trier (Dec 26); and his observation that the treatment of the Germans is not nearly as severe as their own treatment of the civilians in France and Belgium, and remarks upon the prosperity of the German middle class compared to France (Dec 31).

Letters from 1919 all were written from his new position as adjutant to the colonel who is director of the [Medical ?] School at the American University, Beaune Cote d'Or, France, giving instruction in Bacteriology and Pathology, and helping to care for 10,000 patients (Mar 30 & Apr 13); encloses a copy of "The A.E.F.U. Students' Lord's Prayer" which begins, "Our Father who is in Washington, Baker be thy name" (Apr 13); his eagerness to go home causing his restlessness even with new and heavy responsibilities (Apr 20); the American University will close the early part of June, enabling him to go home if the Peace Treaty is signed by then, and is now a Captain (May 11); and describes the impromptu University of Pennsylvania Alumni Dinner at the American University, Beaune Cote d'Or, with the oldest alumnus present from the Class of 1887 (May 25).

Contents List

Correspondence of Sgt. Major John Bleimeyer 1918 Apr-1919

Box 1

Extent 3 folders

Liberty Masonic Club By-Laws and Minutes, John G. Bleimeyer, Secretary 1919

Box 1

Photographs & Printed Material Pertaining to Sgt. Major Bleimeyer 1918-1919, 1961, n.d.

Box 1

Correspondence of Private Greg N. Auger 1918 May-1919 Mar

Box 1

Extent 4 folders

Diary kept by Private Greg N. Auger regarding his army career 1918-1919

Box 1

Extent 8 pages

Correspondence of Corporal D. Fowler Campbell 1917

Box 1

Correspondence of Corporal D. Fowler Campbell 1918-1919

Box 2

Extent 4 folders

Diary of Private T.H. Franklin, Jr. 1918

Box 2

Correspondence of Captain M.B.S. Fleisher 1918-1919

Box 2

Extent 2 folders