

Christmas Day, December, 1917:

This day and yesterday have been for me too busy in order to enjoy them as Christmas Eve and Day should be. However, I have finally shut myself up alone to spend the rest of the afternoon with my own little family circle. I suppose we are more than 3,000 miles apart in actual distance, yet in thought I am trying to fancy that you are in the room with me and that I am to hear from Mother, Nelson and Robert how they passed Christmas Eve and whether the little souvenirs I sent arrived on time. But since you are not really here, it will be for me

to tell my story first and later on read yours—though I have not had a letter from anyone yet. It is the same with my adjutant, Captain Pill.

As I said in letter No. Ten, it would be a few days before I would have a chance to write again. Since then I have traveled more than 200 miles in a Ford—all hail the Ford! And two days besides in an antique French machine and one day additional in our own little auto ambulance—a Ford. These French roads are everywhere splendid. Otherwise I might not be so enthusiastic about the Ford. Our own transportation has not yet reached us and judging from the celerity of delivery of everything else, it will be at least a month before it does, but in the meantime we have one little Ford Red Cross ambulance received at our port of landing.

Arrived here on the eighteenth, after a most interesting, if chilly, auto drive over perfect roads, in width of pavement like our concrete roads, but with about ten feet additional of good earth road on either side. As a rule the “grand routes” are bordered on each side with trees of either sycamore, whose boughs meet in the middle of the road—or the fringe is a border of cork oak and which are generally denuded of the bark for about six or seven feet from the ground. The bark is regularly stripped for cork and in due time it grows out again.

One hundred or so years ago this country was a wide expanse of sand and sandy morais—a desert, but about that time experiments were made with a view of growing a forest of pine and, after years of trial and discouragement, the successful methods were found, so that the “woods” are of trees from fifty to seventy years—a species of pine resembling in appearance our “jack pine,” but growing fifty to sixty feet high and with limbs about thirty feet from the ground.

The thrift of the people! All the ferns (just like our brakes) and moss and brambles are gathered annually, mixed with manure, and put back on the farms for fertilizer. The tree is cut level with the ground, the limbs down to two feet for wood and the balance gathered in baskets. Manure here passes for currency—same as in

the Black Forest. Our two camps expect to have a nice fund for the purchase of knick-knacks and which will be derived from the sale of manure. Also we are going to get some piglets and grow them on our kitchen refuse, and sell them at a profit and buy more piglets, etc., etc.

The day I drove out to inspect "F" Company camp it was snowing and I am sure if you had been with me you would have pitied and yet admired the fortitude of this French womanhood. The roughest and hardest kind of work; no men to do it. Girls of fourteen, bare head and bare hands, repairing the road in the snow storm. Others at work chopping wood and driving oxen; old women, bent and worn, and boys from seven to fifteen, but no able-bodied men, only old men and men from the front invalided. Women on the railroads—section gangs. The drive for 120 miles was through these "maritime pine" forests, broken only now and then by a little old quaint and curious hamlet, but splendid roads! And we will tour them together when the war is over.

The first day after arriving here was spent in getting a general idea of "our timber" and camp, mill locations, sidings, etc. The timber had already been bought by our Forestry Service, but we must build our mills, permanent camps, stables, logging roads, side tracks and wagon roads.

The second and third days were spent in going to "F" Company—at Houeillere—and on the twenty-first my two companies "A" and "C" and headquarters arrived, but not in time to detrain them until the morning of the twenty-second. We had previously rented a motor truck and one other arrived from the 10th Engineers, with some gasoline, so that after taking the men off the trains in the morning, we had both companies at their camp sites, one four miles and one five miles, and the noon meal cooked on our army ovens. By night their tents were up, their stoves inside and fires going. The French officers could hardly believe it, for each company numbers 240 men (250 originally) and each had three baggage cars of property. They were a happy bunch of men and glad to get to work, to hear the sound of the axe

and saw and fall of the tree. Both camps are, of course, right in the woods. All the French officials were, by appointment, at the station to see us march out, and before I could begin to do anything it was necessary that I call socially on all. The *prefecture*, the *commandante d'armee*, the *maire* (mayor), the *sous maire* (under-mayor), the *medicin-chef* (senior surgeon), the *chef de gare* (superintendent of railroads), the *chef gendarm* (chief of police) and finally the owner of the timber. They are all without exception most charming to meet, but beginning with yesterday they have been returning my calls. I forgot the *chef de post* (postmaster). I think you may realize that I have been these past seven days quite busy with all of these social stunts added to the regular work.

On the trip to Houeillere, we stopped over night at a village—the capital of this district (department of Landes)—Mont de Marsan. And when we take the tour after the war I hope we may be in it on a market day and view the country folk coming into town through the alley-like streets and taking up their stations on the sidewalk, where they spread out their wares for sale. It was really like that stage setting in "The Garden of Allah." I think that is the spectacular play where the cart drawn by the donkey, the camels, the burden bearers, etc., filed by. At Mont de Marsan all that was missing for a duplicate of the setting were the camels. The greatest market day of the year, the Saturday before Christmas, was the day our men arrived, so I was too busy to notice it, but all of the country folk, their chickens, ducks, geese, pigs, cows and best produce and home-made articles were from miles around located in two streets bordering the park.

This town (Dax) is a very well-known watering place and this hotel is such a grand one that I hardly feel that it is appropriate for me and my staff to stop here in war time. But it is such a contrast to the huts in which we were quartered at St. Nazaire! There we had earth floors and no doors and no heat, and then to be translated to this establishment!

Captain Pill and I are rooming together and when I

showed him his room he exclaimed, "Well, Major, the horrors of war will be when we have to leave this place." This place is something on the order of Mt. Clemens—only the waters are not sulphur. They flow in immense volume and are hot! The springs where Caesar (Julius) used to take his bath are surrounded by a rectangular, ornamental wall, with iron grated windows, through which you can see the crystal water with a perpetual cloud of steam arising. Captain Campbell claims that is what makes it so foggy here, and the fogs at Red Rock—Rockland—are not a circumstance. At this spring the townsfolk come for blocks with their pitchers to get hot water. Within a stone's throw are the old Roman ramparts, still standing in splendid preservation, about twenty feet high.

I have my headquarters in the town and one company on one side about four miles away and the other on another side about five miles distant. The headquarters detachment, about forty men, are encamped—where do you think?—well, I got permission to pitch our tents in the "Arena"—a Spanish bull ring, surrounded with raised seats all constructed of concrete, similar to our ball park, except the diameter of the ring is only about 150 feet, but is the best camping place we will ever get. Under the concrete raised benches are rooms where we store our baggage, also toilet rooms; and where they kept the bulls and horses we are going to keep our horses, pigs, auto trucks, automobile, and the best of all—one of the hot springs is but a few feet from the entrance. A circular, concrete wall with only two entrances encloses the place—a most admirable place for a little camp. When we shut the big door we are hidden from the curious, though friendly, public, which has been flocking to look at us so much that I had the mayor put up a notice that it was forbidden to enter the arena without permission from him. Soon we shall have the arena connected with electric light and our own telephone to the two camps—and then we will be settled.

My men have just "picked up" a man in the uniform of a Canadian and he is either demented or a spy, so I

sent him to the town "bastile" and will soon have to go and investigate him.

Just advised that tomorrow we get twenty sacks of mail. I have not had a letter from you yet. If those twenty sacks fail to have several I will be disappointed. I heard also that our boat, the *Madawaska*, had not sailed on the twentieth, so the long first letter I wrote will not reach you for some days yet.

This has not been like Christmas for us. I tried to make it a little like it last night. I gave a dinner to my staff and the two company commanders—ten of us. We had roast turkey and plum pudding and the plum pudding was real home-like, but there was not much jollity at the table and I knew that everyone's heart was back somewhere in the States. I called the roll by states and it was:

Vermont, one, Lieutenant Doctor Aldrich.

Maine, one, Lieutenant Freedman.

New York, one, Lieutenant Dentist.

California, one captain.

Pennsylvania, one captain.

New Jersey, one captain.

Wisconsin, one captain.

Michigan, one major, myself.

We had the Stars and Stripes and Tri-color hanging and toasted both flags, "our wives, sisters and sweethearts," the President of France and President Wilson. Tell Nelson that the plum pudding lacked the hard sauce.

Have been to see about that Canadian and will telegraph the commanding officer of the Canadian forces in this district to send for him. The fellow is O. K., but without funds and is off in his upper story.

Have received another letter of commendation, which I enclose, so you see that we are behaving ourselves. Have not seen a paper in over a week. There is no news in them when we do see them here. Just extracts from American papers. All of the French people seem down-hearted at the collapse of Russia.

Tomorrow I have to make about a ten-mile tramp through the timber and around the lines of the block that

Captain Elam is to cut and have left a call for 5:00 o'clock, so my girl and kiddies, good night.

Sunday, December 30, 1917:

This is in answer to your Thanksgiving letter and is being written as indicated by the Y. M. C. A. symbol above. Have driven in a French automobile 128 miles in the last twenty-four hours and am in one of the largest cities in France.* The hotel is so cold—for lack of coal—that I have looked up this place so as to spend this Sunday afternoon with you and the boys (and Jim and Nellie) at a place where I would not have to wear my overcoat to keep warm.

I wish my descriptive faculties would permit me to picture this Y. M. C. A. to you, so that you could really see it. It is the third story of a very large building overlooking one of the "Places"—or plazas or squares. After climbing the three stairways, all of stone steps common to all of the buildings, I entered a room in which was an American girl at a table—the information desk—and in the room were several U. S. sailors and soldiers. On the walls were placards, being invitations to the different churches and to an entertainment to be given New Year's. Looking through two adjoining rooms, I saw in one a large, long table, at which soldiers and sailors were writing letters, and in the other room, with clouds of cigarette smoke our "boys" were seated at tables, eating real ice cream and cakes, visiting and listening to the piano alternately rendering a hymn or "Dixie" or other airs. Just now the air is "Long, Long Ago," and do you wonder that it has caused me to pause, close my eyes, and see that old school room in Grayling where we used to sing it when you played the organ. . . . I am writing this in the little private office of the secretary, a triangular room about eight by ten—but with a fire-place with a *real coal fire!*

Your letter of November 29th reached me December 26th. Tell the boys that I enjoyed both of their letters and hope to receive more soon. That cartoon was a pat reminder of the evenings with Nelson and the algebra at

Fontanet Courts, Washington, D. C.—am keeping it as a souvenir. Tell the boys that if I get the kodak I will certainly take some pictures for them, but it is against the rules to mail them and I will have to take them home with me.

In the only paper that I have seen in a week—the Paris edition of the New York Herald—I was pleased to read of the conviction of Kaltschmidt. I wonder if Uncle Sam will not have to enlarge the federal prisons.

You are probably wondering where I am writing this letter and I hope you may guess, although I am not permitted to advise you. I am about 100 miles away from my headquarters, here on official business. Think you know from other letters where that town is, and I think I wrote you about the surroundings of our headquarters camp and the hotel in which I had been staying.

Near the hotel is a large "Casino" in which during peace time there was a music hall, gaming tables, cafe and theater. On Christmas Eve we were all invited to the movies and though the explanations were in French I was able to understand it and enjoy it. But it was pitiful when after the performance the soldiers tried to sing the Star Spangled Banner to the accompaniment of French violinist—a young lady who is stopping at the hotel and who was good enough to play for our Christmas dinner—but the rendering of that National Hymn of ours was certainly painful. . . .

While writing the above one of the secretaries entered the room, followed by an American "Jackie," and closed the door. I could not help listening to the conversation, a most pitiful story about a nineteen-year-old Belgian girl, whose father and brother were killed by the Huns, and this poor girl left alone. Well, this "Jackie," who is an American citizen now, is married and has a home in Newton, Massachusetts, was educated at the Belgian Military School and is a Master Mason. He showed me letters from his lodge and from Senator Weeks. He had gone to school with the girl in Brussels when a boy. He saw her on the street here, recognized her, and received the story from her lips of her work and despair. So he

*Paris—which Major Hartwick visited during his trip to General Pershing's headquarters at Chaumont.

came to the Y. M. C. A. for help. Poor girl—well, I shelled out ten francs and am going to try to help her more. I have never seen her, but if she were in Detroit as an assistant to Miss Stevens she could earn a living and do some good. Her case is one of thousands. The Kaiser should suffer!

Day before yesterday there came to my camp a Canadian soldier who acted very queerly and I thought he might be a spy, so turned him over to the French military. They kept him a day and found that he was "dippy" from shell-shock, so turned him over to the Canadian headquarters at the base. One of the statements he made to me was that he was "traveling out of Paris for the firm." Evidently he had been a Canadian traveling man before the war.

We had two inches of snow yesterday and it was beautiful while touring that 100 or so miles over perfect roads, bordered on each side with tall sycamore or cork oaks, their boughs laden with snow and the roadway perfectly white for miles ahead. I am enclosing a pencil list of the contents of the comfort bag from Mrs. Woodrow Wilson.

Have had an invitation from the gentleman who sold us the timber to go trout fishing in the spring. He speaks about as good English as I speak French, and he said, "It ees jolie to catc zee troot wiz zee flee." Do you get it? To catch the trout on a fly is fun. Expect to return to my base on New Year's Day.