

In Grandpa Martin's Footsteps



Martin Verhage USA 2814890

In Grandpa Martin's footsteps – how it began

In late October 2006, my wife Ellen and I traveled to Kansas City, Missouri so that Ellen could attend a medical conference. This was my first experience as a “trailing spouse,” and I was determined to make the most of it. We rented a car, and while she attended daily conference sessions I was free to explore Kansas City and the surrounding areas. Within a five-minute walk from our hotel were two points of interest: Union Station, the railroad hub through which my father had passed on his way to basic training in San Diego in 1944, and the Liberty Memorial, dedicated to veterans of World War I, situated on a hill overlooking Union Station. One day I decided to stick around the hotel and visit both places.

The Liberty Memorial (www.libertymemorialmuseum.org) was built in the 1920s to honor the men and women who fought in what then was known as “the Great War.” Situated atop a large hill overlooking downtown Kansas City, the Liberty Memorial is an imposing granite structure built in the federal monument style (reminiscent of the Lincoln Memorial or Fort Knox). The visitor feels very small in comparison to the massive tableaus of carved stone, the wide staircases, and especially the main plaza, upon which sits a 217-foot tall stone obelisk.

The Memorial complex also includes two exhibition halls occupying opposite ends of the main plaza. In one of these halls, I found a display of the insignia of different military units of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF), along with descriptions of the geographic origin and composition of each military organization represented. I worked my way around the room, stopping to read carefully the exhibit related to the 32nd Division, a unit made up primarily of national guardsmen from Wisconsin and Michigan. I mentioned to the historian on duty that my grandfather had fought in WWI, and that I thought he was living in Wisconsin during the period of the war. He told me that the AEF comprised three different sub-groups: (1) the relatively small standing army of the US; (2) national guard units from several states (including those from Wisconsin and Michigan, which later became the 32nd Division); and (3) the so-called “National Army” made up of soldiers from the military draft instituted by President Wilson in mid-1917. The historian said that although it was most likely that Grandpa Martin had been one of these drafted men, it was impossible to say for sure without more information about his military unit.

As I walked back down the hill toward the hotel, I reviewed my limited inventory of memories about Grandpa Martin. He died in January of 1969, shortly after my family returned from a six-month trip to Nigeria, and so my recollections of him date mainly from before our departure for Africa. As a child I used to go down to the basement workshop at Grandpa Martin's home on Lowell Avenue to “help” him with his building and refinishing projects. On one of the workshop walls he had displayed a black and white photograph of his infantry company from WWI, which probably caught my eye because of its unusual oblong shape. I am sure that I asked him about it, but now I cannot remember his response, or even if he gave a response. This photograph, which still hangs in the Verhage home on Lowell Avenue, contained important scraps of

information that identified Grandpa Martin's Infantry Regiment and Company. These basic data opened the door to a fascinating journey through WWI internet sites, libraries at Duke and Johns Hopkins Universities, facilities of the National Archives and Records Administration at College Park, Maryland and Chicago, Illinois and ultimately a visit to France to walk the battlefields in Grandpa Martin's footsteps, 89 years later.

My main purpose in writing this document was to share results of my research with other interested family members. Grandpa Martin did not talk much about his experiences in Europe, and he left no written record such as a diary, or letters to loved ones. The only tangible evidence of his service was his uniform and a small collection of souvenirs including his dog tags, a German belt buckle, a German trench knife, a gas mask container and some medals. Interviews with family members turned up few reminiscences: Dave Bratt remembered that Grandpa Martin enjoyed watching war movies, and that once while watching a documentary on WWI, Grandpa Martin suddenly became very animated and told Dave that he had been right in that same geographical area (Dave remembers it as Verdun, and Martin's regiment once camped within 10 miles of Verdun). Dave also remembered asking Grandpa if he had ever shot any Germans, and Grandpa replied that he thought so, but wasn't sure because the Germans usually were very far away and difficult to see. Paul DeVries remembered Grandpa telling him about a German shell that hit the foxhole next to Grandpa's, killing the occupant.

As I learned more about the First World War, though, it was clear that Grandpa Martin served in a Division that played an important role in an extraordinary chapter in our country's history. His organization (the 89th "Middle West" Division) participated in the two main offensives led by American forces, and his Regiment, with Martin's company in the front line, captured a strategic ridge in the Argonne Forest during the final push in November 1918, helping to convince German commanders that their cause was lost. Aside from the military accomplishments, I also was intrigued by the thought of how Grandpa Martin would have perceived this adventure: a farm boy from an insular Wisconsin immigrant community, pulled into a World War that took him thousands of miles away from home and confronted him at every step with new, unusual and sometimes terrifying experiences. Many times I have imagined what it would be like to sit with him and hear about his experiences firsthand. Although this is not possible, I was able to locate some diaries and letters of soldiers who served with Martin, in some cases in the same infantry company. Hopefully, the recollections of these men can convey something of the character of Grandpa Martin's experience in the Great War.

Part I: Induction, Training and the Journey to France

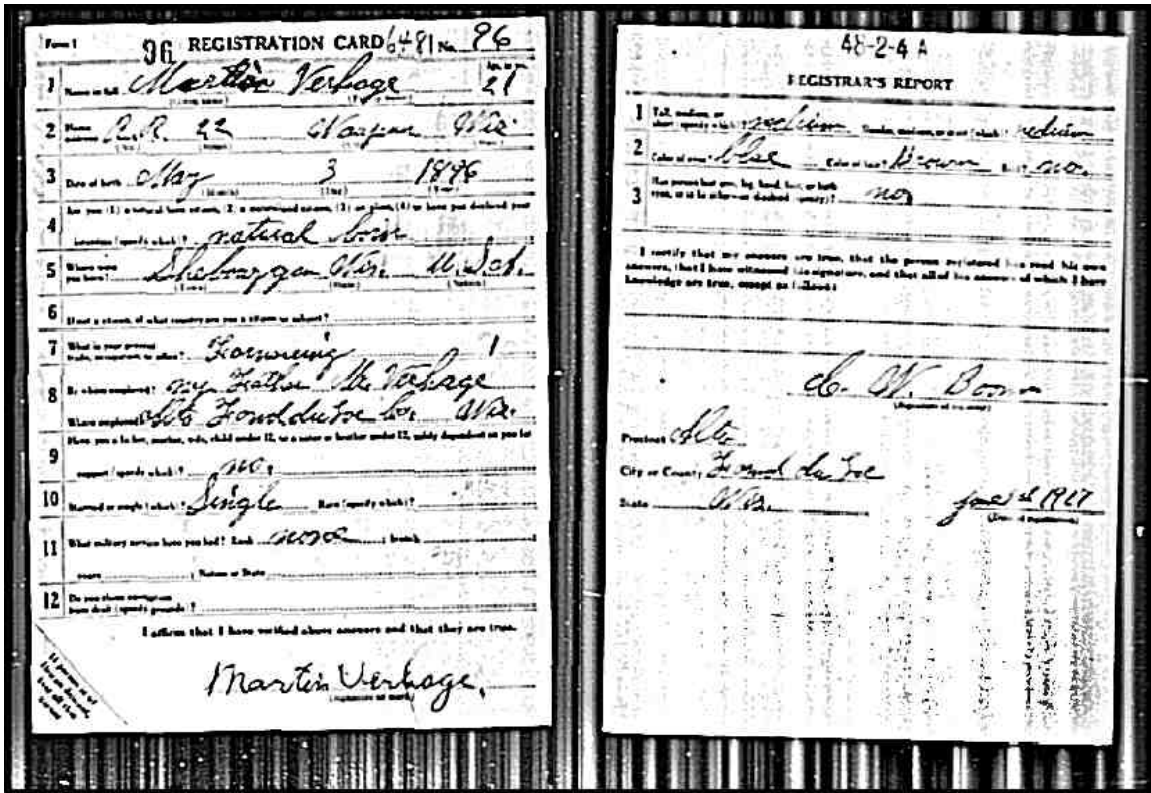
When the United States Congress declared war on Germany in April 1917, the US military was a paper tiger. Troop strength of the standing US Army totaled only 126,000 men, putting the Americans in 17th place worldwide, just behind Portugal. On May 18, 1917, recognizing the need to raise a much larger force, the US Congress passed the Selective Service Act, giving President Woodrow Wilson the authority to call American men to compulsory military service. The first group to register for the draft included men born between June 6, 1886 and June 5, 1896. By the war's end in late 1918, approximately 24 million men had registered with the Selective Service system, representing almost one-half of the total male population of the United States. Eventually, these drafted men made up nearly 80% of US forces sent to France.

This action of Congress had immediate impacts that were felt throughout the country, including in rural Alto Wisconsin, where 21-year-old Martin Verhage worked for his father Peter on the family farm. Peter Verhage had immigrated to the United States from the Netherlands around 1887 as a 16-year-old orphan, and later married Jean Leys, an immigrant from Zeeland, Netherlands. Martin, their oldest child, was born on May 3, 1896 in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, and was named for Jean's father, Marinus Leys. Two years later, Jean gave birth to a daughter Katie, and then in 1901 tragedy struck the Verhage family: shortly after giving birth to a third child, Jean Verhage died of an infection. The infant, who was named John, did not live with Martin's family but was raised by an uncle on the Leys side of the family. Peter Verhage subsequently remarried and had six more children with his second wife, Elizabeth Buteyn.

Martin probably learned of the requirement to register for the draft through newspaper advertisements or printed handbills that were posted in cities and towns. One such notice read as follows:

ATTENTION! All males between the ages of 21 and 30 years, both inclusive, must personally appear at the polling place in the Election District in which they reside, on Tuesday, June 5th, 1917 between the hours of 7 A.M. and 9 P.M. to REGISTER in accordance with the President's proclamation.

Failure to register for the draft carried harsh penalties, including possible imprisonment for a period of up to one year. Although Peter Verhage probably was devastated by the news that his eldest son and main farmhand might be called away from the family farm for an extended period, Martin had little choice but to register. Thus, on June 5, 1917, Martin appeared at the designated place in Fond-du-Lac County, Wisconsin, and provided information to the official in charge of the local draft board. Photographs of draft registration cards for a large number of WWI veterans are available on-line; in fact, Martin's draft registration card was the first piece of official information found in my search (see below). Martin's examiner noted that he was of medium height and build, and that he had blue eyes, brown hair, and was showing no signs of balding.



From the information on the photograph in Anna Verhage’s house, I knew that Martin eventually was assigned to the 89th Division, based at Camp Funston, Kansas. Initially, though, it was unclear whether he was drafted in an early group and sent to training camp during the second half of 1917, or whether he was part of a later group that was inducted in the spring of 1918. Every county in the United States established at least one draft board to maintain registration records and to send groups of drafted men to training camps as directed by the Selective Service. I learned from a conversation with an Archivist that draft boards recorded information about these men on US Form 1029, also known informally as “lists of men ordered to report”. The Chicago branch of the National Archives and Records Administration maintains these records for Mid-western states, and archives personnel eventually located the relevant form 1029. The date of induction was April 25, 1918, and Martin’s name is the first one to appear on the list of 38 men sent to Camp Grant, Illinois, one of the “cantonments” that had been hurriedly built in 1917 to serve as training camps for National Army troops. Most of Martin’s fellow draftees listed their “primary industry” as farming (the group also included several construction workers, a grain dealer, a grocer and a “railroad man”). Interestingly, nearly all of these men also had German-sounding surnames. Such names might create suspicion among other soldiers, and if there was any doubt about the loyalty of an inductee, military authorities could assign him to a US-based duty station (such as guarding the US-Mexican border), or release him from military service altogether.

Form 100 FMGO. ORIGINAL. When completed to be mailed by Military Authorities to the Provost Marshal General, Washington, D. C.

48-2-4
Local Board for Division No. 2
Franklin County, Wisconsin
Ripon, Wisconsin.

MAY 1918 Ser No. 1
Date, April 26, 1918

The selected men herein described, having been inducted into military service on April 25, 1918 have this date been entrained for Camp Grant, Rockford, Ill. (Date)
(Camp or Station)

This statement consists of 2 sheets.

1 Order No.	2 Serial No.	3 NAME.	4 Call No.	5 Primary Industry.	6 Classification.					7 Failed to report to Military Authorities.
					I	II	III	IV	V	
648	96	Martin Verhage	144	Farming	E					
236	391	Gust C. Meyn	"	Farming	A					
255	112	Ralph Broadway	"	Farming	A					
320	944	Alfred William Rank	"	Farming	A					
325	122	William Redeker	"	Farming	I					
350	950	Louis Tonn	"	Farming	A					
355	1857	Alvin Gust	"	Concrete	F					
377	822	Helmuth Doering	"	Farming	A					
378	504	Amberto Testolin	"	Laborer	A					
381	1510	Fred Klein	"	Cemetwork	A					
384	312	Henry Uelmen	"	Farming	A					
387	1626	Frank Brown	"	Farming	E					
389	90	Joseph Vandekalk	"	Farming	D					
392	1187	Albert Roeder	"	Farming	F					
394	753	Henry bedessem	"	Farming	A					
410	300	John peterman	"	Farming	A					
413	1240	Henry Mishlove	"	Grocer	A					
436	1652	Henry Henning	"	Farming	I					
439	1798	Charles Heideman	"	Farming	A					
443	441	Fern Manion	"	Auto Driver	A					
460	438	George Krieser	"	Farming	A					
466	357	William Woolenberg	"	Farming Grain Dealer	I F					
470	1881	Phillip Kohl	"	Farming	A					
474	1201	George Yassar	"	Farming	A					
475	1978	Charles Joseph Cole	"	Railroad man	A					
478	1747	Martin Junkman	"	Farming	A					

RECEIVED
MAY 3-1918
P.M.G.M.

So from one day to the next, Martin left behind the life of a fieldworker in a sheltered community of Dutch immigrant farmers and entered a very different world populated by personalities he likely never had encountered in Alto, Wisconsin. His first experience as a drafted man was to join other recruits onboard a train to Camp Grant. A similar experience is described by a fellow 89th Division recruit who arrived at training camp at about the same time:

“The troop train on which I rode to Camp Funston, Kansas, April 29, 1918, was crowded. There were several hundred of us aboard, and no time was lost in formal introductions. While passing through towns along the way, heads and shoulders were thrust out of car windows and loud yells greeted those townspeople, who went to the trouble to go down to see the ‘boys pass through’. Inside the coaches ‘crap’ games were in full blast and drinks were freely passed around. Most of us were asleep when we arrived at Camp Funston near Fort Riley, Kansas at 1 o’clock at night. A sergeant came aboard and ordered us to ‘hit the cinders’ pronto. Outside we formed a column four abreast and, directed by the sergeant, marched to our barracks where we were assigned cots and then told to hit the hay ‘right now’. In 15 minutes the lights were turned out and we were ordered to go to sleep.” (Callaway, pp. 11-12)

These were just the first events in a sudden and undoubtedly jarring introduction to military life. According to the official History of the 89th Division, new recruits were quickly parted with any trappings of their old lives as civilians. Their commanding officer was responsible for collecting the clothing they had worn on their journey to the training camp, and personally supervised the fitting of their hobnailed boots. On the first day in camp, all recruits were instructed to take a shower, and then afterward officers carried out careful visual examinations with flashlights (!) to ensure that no communicable diseases were present. “If such signs were found, the recruit was bundled off to the hospital. If not, he dressed himself in new government underclothing and overalls and entered the barrack building” (English, History of the 89th Division, p. 24). Recruits also received their first equipment (two blankets, a mess kit and a bed-sack that was to be filled with straw), underwent another examination performed by a physician, and were given a series of inoculations against smallpox, typhoid and paratyphoid. They were issued military clothing, they became accustomed to army “chow” and began learning the basics of military drill. Their days were so filled with duties that “one recruit expressed his feelings by saying plaintively that Sunday in the Army was just like Monday on the farm” (English, p. 24)

Below is a photo of Martin as a new recruit, with a barracks building in the background on the left, and the detached “bathing building” on the right. He is wearing military-issue clothing (probably made of wool), old-style leather puttees (the later versions were made of wool and were wrapped around the lower leg in a spiral configuration) and is holding a rifle, probably a bolt-action M1917 in .30 caliber. The circumstances of this photo are unknown. First, it is not known whether this photo was taken at Camp Grant or Camp Funston, the cantonment from where he left for France. All training camps were built using similar materials, plans and layouts, and so the buildings in the photo do not provide definitive proof for the site being Camp Grant or Camp Funston. Second, the lack of other soldiers in the photo is odd, because the training camps were very crowded places. It is possible that the Army sent home individual photographs of new recruits in their military garb in order to show the family that their soldier had arrived at the camp and was well. It is interesting that Martin’s hair in the photo is still so long (as one family member said, “Lyle Lovett” look); if recruits were given haircuts soon after arriving at training camp, then this photo was likely taken at Camp Grant.



Martin's stay at Camp Grant was brief, likely a few weeks at the most. The History of the 89th Division explains how by the early spring of 1918, the 89th had been "skeletonized" (i.e., broken up) due to transfers of trained soldiers from Camp Funston to other military units that were preparing to leave for France. Replacements in the ranks of the 89th Division were therefore needed, and new recruits from other nearby training camps were sent to Camp Funston to bring the 89th back up to full strength. Martin was one of the men sent from Camp Grant to Camp Funston in late spring of 1918, and one account suggests that some of Martin's fellow travelers were not very happy about their reassignment to the 89th.

"About the middle of May (1918) we received a number of men from Camp Grant, Illinois, of the 86th Division. This entire Division was broken up and its personnel and members were absorbed by other units. In this way we received a bunch of "busted" – (reduced to the rank of buck private) – non-commissioned

officers, a bunch of real trained ‘soreheads’ who did little else besides sulking or griping about this calamity of theirs – this transfer to the 89th Division. One tough-looking ex-top sergeant was repeatedly grumbling over his fate, saying “I always said if they transfer, hope that they would not put me in the ----- 89th Division, now here I am in this *** **** outfit” (Schoppenhorst, p. 28).¹

It also is clear that Martin had very little time to adjust to Army life before the 89th received its orders to embark for France. “... a large contingent of newly drafted men was received within two weeks of the departure of the Division for overseas, and those weeks were crowded weeks for them. They were equipped, trained in the elements of marching and of manual of arms, given their typhoid prophylaxis and vaccination, all at breakneck speed. But nearly all of their time they spent on the rifle range” (English, p. 38). Another account states that “...it was drill, drill and more drill from morn till night, until they would or would not fall into proper line” (Schoppenhorst, p. 28).

AEF Structure and Hierarchy

A basic understanding of how the US military was structured in 1918 is needed to be able to follow descriptions of battles and troop movements related to Martin’s service. General John J. Pershing, the commander of the AEF, created a new divisional structure that he believed would be better suited to penetrate intricate German defenses and fully exploit any breakthroughs into enemy-held territory. Pershing’s innovation was the so-called “square” Division, consisting of two infantry brigades of two regiments each (hence the “square” designation), one field artillery brigade (two 75-mm regiments, one 155-mm regiment), an engineer regiment, a machine-gun battalion, a signal battalion, and division supply and sanitary trains. Total divisional strength including all of the support functions was nearly 28,000 men, which was more than twice the size of divisions in major European armies of the time.

In Martin’s case, he belonged to the 89th Division, called the “Middle West” Division because the majority of its soldiers came from Midwestern states including Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Minnesota, Illinois and Wisconsin. The 89th Division included two brigades of infantry, the 177th and the 178th, each with approximately 8,500 men. A brigade consisted of two regiments of 3,800 men, and one machine gun battalion. Each regiment was further divided into battalions (3 per regiment) and companies (250 men per company, 4 companies per battalion). Companies were identified by letters (“A”, “B” and so on); therefore, companies “A” through “D” comprised the first battalion, “E” through “H” the second battalion, and “I” through “M” the third battalion (there was no company “J”, probably because of the possibility of confusion with company “I”). Companies were further subdivided into platoons (50 – 58 men per platoon, 4 – 5 platoons per company), and smaller units within platoons included squads (8 – 12 soldiers) and 3 – 4 man fire teams.

¹ Frank Schoppenhorst was a mechanic from Marthasville, Missouri who was assigned to Martin’s company of 250 men. Schoppenhorst was a keen observer of events, and after the war wrote a lengthy memoir about his experiences in the AEF. His account closely parallels Martin’s experiences since members of the same company usually occupied the same geographic area.

Command structure was as follows: a General commanded a Division, a Brigadier General commanded a brigade, a Colonel commanded a Regiment, a Major commanded a battalion, a Captain commanded a Company and a Lieutenant commanded a platoon. During combat operations, casualty rates among officers were much higher than among enlisted men, which sometimes resulted in lower-ranking officers such as Corporals or Sergeants being put in command of platoons or even companies.

Martin was a Private in Company "I", 3rd battalion, 354th Infantry Regiment, 177th Brigade, 89th Division. His platoon and squad status are unknown. It is most likely that he was a rifleman, specializing in the use of the Enfield model 1917 .30 caliber rifle, but he also could have received special training as a rifle grenadier or as a member of an automatic rifle squad. We do know, though, that as a Private, Martin occupied the absolute bottom rung of the command ladder in the AEF.

Journey to France

During the second half of May 1918, signs were clear that the 89th was preparing to move to France to join the struggle against Germany. Many of the more experienced soldiers were kept busy packing all of the Division's equipment, while the recent arrivals (probably including Martin) camped out on the rifle range to receive additional marksmanship practice. On the night of May 26, Company "I" soldiers "scrubbed the barracks (and) slept on the bare wire cots for several hours, (with full uniform) ready to leave on a short notice" (Schoppenhorst, pg. 29). At four AM the next morning, Martin and the rest of his regiment began the 4,800-mile journey from Camp Funston, Kansas to the battlefields of France.

"'Squads Right, March!' was the clear command, quickly and calmly the men responded, everyone seemingly glad to bid "good-bye" to dear old dusty Camp Funston. Some of the officers shed tears, while others were just as hard-boiled as ever. Soon we arrived at Funston Depot where several trains were waiting on the switch. Our train was composed of thirteen cars, ten Pullman, one baggage (in which was located our kitchen) and two freight cars in which was stored our heavy company freight. The trainload consisted of Company "I" and Company "K", or in other words five hundred men to a trainload" (Schoppenhorst, p. 30).

The early portion of the rail journey passed through hometowns of many of these men, providing opportunities for final meetings between loved ones:

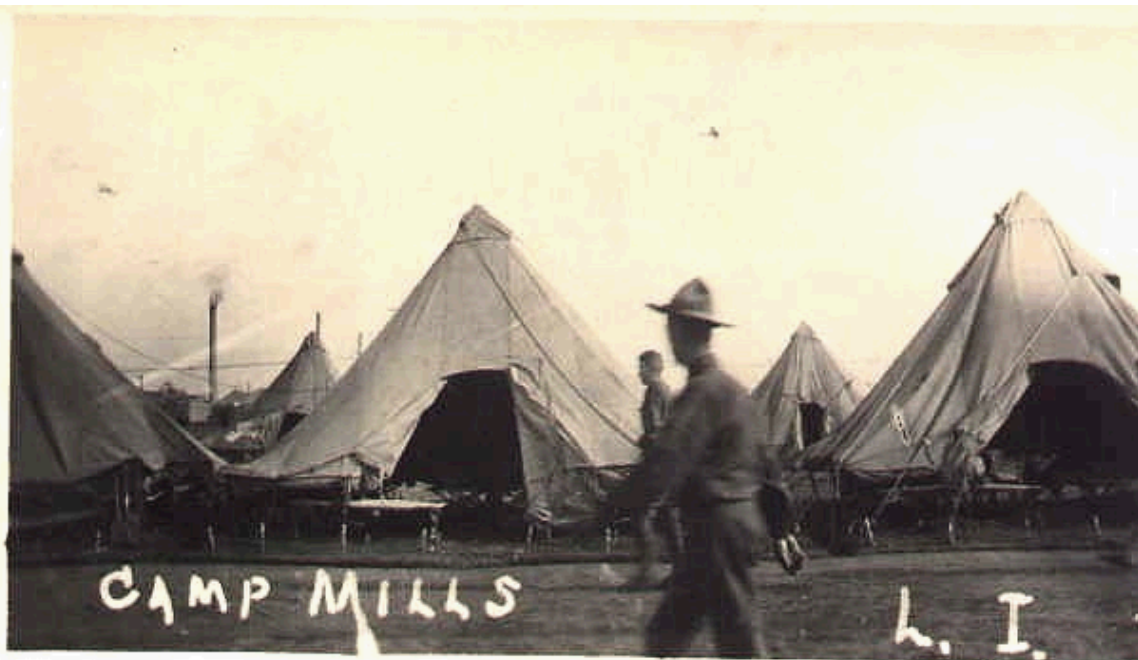
"May 28th at 4:45 AM we arrived in St. Louis, Mo, while many of the boys on this train were drafted from St. Louis, and had somehow sent word ahead to their relatives that we were coming through. Since the entire regiment was on the move, they had made it a point to watch the troop trains as they passed through. Some of these folks had been watching for two days, and other had been there in the yards for the last twelve hours, all anxious to see their folks – perhaps for the last time. An immense crowd had gathered, yet we stopped only three fourths of

an hour. No one was allowed to leave the cars, guards were placed at all the doors, with the instructions not to leave anyone on or off the cars, so the visiting had to be done through the windows. “Oh, what pain it is to part”, everywhere one could hear “Good-bye!” for mother, father, wife, sister, brother, sweetheart, and friends. Tears rolled from many a boy’s eyes ...” (Schoppenhorst p. 31).

Martin’s troop train passed through parts of Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York and New Jersey. In many of the small towns, crowds gathered to cheer as the soldiers passed by. Occasionally the train would stop so that the men could engage in physical exercise, principally by taking brisk hikes through small towns on the railway line. One of these stops afforded the men of Company “I” an opportunity to create some mischief at the expense of the officer in command of their train.

“Our commanding officer, Major Styvers, had some relatives in this town and was visiting with them at the depot. We were all in our places, and the train crew was ready to go, then to top the works, someone pulled the cord for the signal to “go”. Here we go! Chug, chug, down the line for some distance when all of a sudden we stopped. We wondered what had happened, then here came the Major, struttin’ and cursing as he passed along the outside of the cars, in all the rain. He wanted to know who had given the order to pull out, and gave everyone within shouting distance to know that HE WAS IN COMMAND OF THIS TRAIN AND THAT NO ONE ELSE HAD ANYTHING TO SAY ABOUT OUT TIME OF DEPARTURE! It was good that it was raining or else he might have gotten too hot.... We had a good laugh about this prank...” (Schoppenhorst, p.32).

The company’s final destination was Camp Mills on Long Island, another of the cantonments built to assist in the task of moving men and material from the US to France.



The History of Company "I" entry for May 30, 1918 states the following: "Arrived at Jersey City, New Jersey at 11:00 AM; Crossed East River on ferry to Long Island, where we boarded trains, arriving at Camp Mills, NY at 5:30 PM, making our homes in squad tents until June 3." The 354th used the time at Camp Mills to engage in military drill and to ensure that all supplies and equipment were ready for the ocean voyage.

Late in the evening of June 3, Martin's company left Camp Mills on the Long Island Railroad and headed north. At 8 AM the next morning, the train arrived in Springfield, Massachusetts, where another Company "I" man noted that "ladies of the Red Cross looking like angels board the train and distribute hot coffee and sandwiches, also newspapers with latest news of (German) submarine activities along Atlantic coast. We don't know where we're going, but we're on our way." (Hosmer, pg. 1). During the remainder of June 4, the train continued its northward journey, passing through St. Johnsbury on Lake Memphremagog, and finally crossing the border from Vermont into Canada. At 9 PM, the train arrived at the docks in Montreal, where the troop ship *Ascanius* (see photo below), formerly a passenger liner of the "Blue Funnel" line, was waiting to carry the entire 354th regiment to France.

"Across the St. Lawrence and into Montreal, which looks beautiful in the early evening. Detrain at docks and prepare to go aboard ship at one. I am handed a card which reads as follows: 'Your accommodation is a hammock in K Section.' K section turns out to be in the hold, hammocks so close together with every time you turn over you hit the fellow next to you. The ship, by the way, is the S.S. *Ascanius*, about 8,000 tons burden, a British ship formerly of the Blue Funnel Line, in Australian waters. Has made numerous trips carrying Australians to the Dardanelles. This is her first trip to America" (Hosmer, pg. 1).



The next morning, on the first-year anniversary of draft registration day, Martin's ship left Montreal.

“June 5, 8 AM: The Ascanius pulls out down the St. Lawrence, loaded to the rails with 3000 doughboys. Chow consisting of mutton stew, boiled potatoes, carrots and bread; this for 16 days with few variations. Sail all day down the St. Lawrence, a beautiful stream. A good many recall that one year ago today they had registered for military service” (Hosmer, pg. 1).

After passing Quebec and Newfoundland, Martin's ship arrived on June 8 in Halifax, Nova Scotia where the rest of the 14-ship fleet that would accompany the Ascanius was assembling. This small armada included several warships and other troop transports, and some of the ships were painted with camouflage patterns to defeat the efforts of German submarines, which had recently begun to attack shipping along the eastern seaboard of Canada and the United States. The next day the Ascanius followed the destroyers out of Halifax harbor, beginning an 11-day crossing that was quiet for the most part. Onboard, some passengers were unimpressed by the accommodations.

“June 9-16: Uneventful week, zigzagging across smooth seas with considerable fog keeping us in touch with other ships by sounding whistle occasionally. Grub horrible. Sleeping in hammock not too bad, but K section so crowded that you cannot move without elbowing somebody. I understand how they brought slaves over from Africa. The “Middle Passage” had nothing on this” (Hosmer, pg. 2).

On the evening of June 20, the Ascanius arrived in the English Channel, passed the white cliffs of Dover and sailed up the Thames to Gravesend, a suburb of London. The next morning the troops disembarked at Tilbury docks and marched to a nearby railway station, where each soldier was given a small card offering a royal welcome, signed by King George V.

“After we had our cards we were given a short address of Welcome, by some excited Englishman, what he said we did not hear, for the noise of the English sparrows in the station was almost all one could hear ... after he quit talking we all cheered, I guess it was no harm done as this seemed to please him and we gave him plenty of it” (Schoppenhorst, pg. 51).

Then it was time to board another train to a “rest camp” where the regiment would wait until transportation was available to bring them across the English Channel to France. The route took the regiment through heavily populated south London, where they “passed many factory villages and were enthusiastically cheered by crowds of women and children”(Hosmer, pg. 2). By this point in the war, the absence of men would have been easily noticeable, given the large numbers of British soldiers fighting in France and Belgium. English children sought to interact with the American soldiers.

“We enjoyed watching the passing sights though they were quaint and unusual. We passed through the southern part of London (then the largest city in the world)

where we received, with much comment, several hundred of school children and smaller children, I judge their age to be five or six years, came alongside our train while we were stopping, they were anxious to chat about this or that, frequently asking for souvenirs, “have you a coin mister?” this was their first and most important question. They had evidently seen many troop trains pass through, from whom they had learned the game” (Schoppenhorst, pp. 51-52).

Martin’s rest camp was located just east of Winchester, at a place called Winnall Down. The train arrived at Winchester station late in the evening, and the men marched in the dark with full packs through the center of town to the camp, located a few miles from the train station. The accommodations were not up to the standards of Camp Funston. Barracks were small one-story frame buildings with minimal lighting and heat. Instead of the customary bunk beds, soldiers slept crowded together on “English board beds” which consisted of rough-hewn planks laid on pairs of low trestles. There were not enough bed bags to go around, so many of the men slept right on the boards. The photograph below shows one of the YMCA huts at Winnall Down; Martin may have visited this hut during his stay.



Rations were short at this camp, although the men understood that food was scarce because the British had been at war for nearly four years; “everyone ate his portion and kept still” (Schoppenhorst, pg.57). On the first day at Winnall Down, some of Martin’s company reacted to the morning cold by chopping up some of the bed boards and starting a bonfire in the courtyard, an action that drew a quick response from camp authorities. “I suppose that they had smelled the smoke and at once came out to stop that stuff. We had already used some of that forbidden kindling, so what’s the difference, we needed warmth and besides, the ashes won’t tell, and what’s more what Tommy don’t know don’t make him ‘hot’” (Schoppenhorst, pg. 54).

Members of Martin's company made at least two sightseeing visits into the city of Winchester during their brief stay at Winnall Down. Points of interest mentioned included the statue of King Alfred, the West Gate, the ruins of Wolvesy Palace, and especially the ancient Winchester Cathedral. "Before entering the building, Lieutenant P. Boyle, who had charge of our company, knew that if we went through at this time we would be too late for mess, so he let it to a vote, whether or not we wished to miss supper and go through the building, this vote was taken and everyone was in favor of missing supper to see the ancient building" (Schoppenhorst, pg. 56). At the end of their tour, they met the caretaker of the Cathedral. "...he was an old man and very eager to explain and show us things of interest. I remember on one occasion while passing down a certain aisle, he stopped and pointed with pride up to an old box on a high wall (yes, a high dusty wall inside the building) that box, he said, 'contains the hearts of four Saxon Kings.' Then he opened the doors so that we could see the inside of the auditorium, and hear the magnificent pipe organ which at that time was being played" (Schoppenhorst, pg. 57).

On June 25th, the 354th left Winchester for Southampton where they boarded small fast packet boats for the "much dreaded trip" across the English Channel. Throughout the war, German U-boats disrupted shipping throughout the North Atlantic and Mediterranean, sinking hundreds of ships, and the Channel was one of their most active areas. Rumors flew through the regiment of the supposed demise of recent AEF troop transports, and so Martin and his many of his fellow soldiers likely were extremely relieved when they arrived at Le Havre, France early in the morning of June 26. One member of Company "I" summed up the day as follows: "3 A.M. I celebrate my birthday by arriving in France, Le Havre. 8 A.M. we debark and hike through the streets, passing the building that is used as the capital of Belgium. Up some hills thru fields to a sort of stockade which proves to be another rest camp. My tent is minus a floor. We bunk on the ground" (Hosmer, pg. 3).

This camp had even fewer amenities than the one outside of Winchester, and the men were not permitted to do any sightseeing or even to leave the premises. One of the most memorable experiences related to this camp was the system devised for bathing, which was different than anything the troops had seen previously.

"The building was a small shed-like structure divided into several rooms such as dressing room, hot room, and a cold shower hall. The dressing room was about twelve by fifteen feet and had a concrete floor. Here we had to strip, find a place to hang your clothes on a nail aside the wall, then we were sent to the so-called hot room. I'd call it a sweat room, which was about ten by ten feet closed tight all around having a tight low ceiling. In this room there was a large kettle of boiling soap water. This room was crowded with nude men who were working up a lather on their own bodies with soap furnished us here using no other water for this lather except the perspiration from our own bodies. The atmosphere in this room was very hot and steamy and it soon brought out a profuse sweat. Now when well-lathered up with the sweaty soap suds, we would be taken out of this room and put in a cold shower hall, there they would stand us in a trough while an attendant turned on a stream of cold water, but believe me, if anything takes your

breath, that does. This finishes the bath, and you go try find your own clothes, and after searching for a while you find them and start dressing. That was some bath, but made up my mind, THAT NEVER AGAIN SUCH STUFF!” (Schoppenhorst, pg. 63).

The final stage of the journey from Camp Funston to the 354th's training area in eastern France again involved rail travel, but this time the conveyance was “little French cigar-box cars.” AEF unit histories nearly always mention these boxcars, painted with the words “40 Hommes 8 Chevaux” (“40 men 8 horses”) “which notice prompted one doughboy to remark: ‘well, I don’t mind the 40 men, but I’ll be damned if they won’t have to take out the 8 horses’” (354th War Diary, pg. 213). These boxcars, and the rails they rode on, made for a memorable (and very unpleasant) experience. Thirty-six men with full equipment crowded into each boxcar, leaving no room to sit or lie down comfortably.



The poor condition of the rails and the lack of any suspension on the boxcars made for a very rough ride. “I guess we traveled at about the rate of one hundred miles per hour; that is, we were going forty miles up, and forty miles down, and about twenty miles in a forward direction” (Schoppenhorst, p. 65). At one rest stop along the route the soldiers were able to replenish their stocks of tobacco, which had run low during the long journey. Immediately after leaving this station “I don’t doubt a bit if the cars were seen from a distance it would have appeared as if there was a fire in each one of the box cars, on account of the dense smoke that poured out of every crack, door and window as we went shaking along” (Schoppenhorst, p. 67). As this uncomfortable experience stretched into a

second day, the men were becoming increasingly impatient with this adventure. “First we had to contend with the crowded boat, then in England the cold barracks, then packed like sardines in the ferry boat going across the Channel, then crowded tents, and now it was a crowded boxcar, wonder what’s coming next” (Schoppenhorst, p. 66).

Training near Leurville, France

The unforgettable experience with French mass transit ended late in the evening of June 29 in the town of Rimaucourt, and the tired (“fagged out”) troops were billeted in houses, barns, and a vacant YMCA hut. The next morning at 7 AM Martin’s company began a five-hour march to Leurville, the village where they would undergo five weeks of additional training. “We marched through the town, turning to the right several hundred yards there were several small wooden barracks. These barracks had been built here by American Engineer troops ... in a wheat field about two hundred yards to the southeast of the town. Two of these buildings were used for sleeping quarters, and the other was used as a kitchen and dining room. Here was room for 180 or 190 men, thus one platoon had to be billeted in a barn in the town” (Schoppenhorst, p.69).

The small village of Leurville, which hosted troops of Company “I” for the next five weeks, was home to approximately thirty-five farming families who did not live directly on the land they cultivated but rather commuted to their fields each day. Their living arrangements struck the Americans as unusual: “...each large building housed the family, together with all of its livestock, all under one roof ... directly in front of each house stood a large manure heap, which was daily added to by throwing the manure from the cow stall or the horse stall located right at the next door ...” (Schoppenhorst, p.71). The village also included “a beautiful church, a town hall which also was used as a school house and a post office, a blacksmith shop and a woodwork shop, two cafes in which light wine and beer could be had, a small grocery shop, one public wash house, and one public pond which was free for the use of all” (Schoppenhorst, pp. 71-72).

Although the presence of Martin and his company undoubtedly dominated village life and conversation, the language barrier between the French and the Americans effectively prevented communication between the two groups. Men who had been in the Army for several months would have had opportunity to take a rudimentary French course and learn some basic phrases, but conversing with their hosts was another thing altogether.

“Here we were now in this strange land, none of us could speak or understand these people except four of our boys in our company. Two of these were Italian, and two were French by birth. These boys had been born and partly educated in their native country, had migrated to America, and then as the draft came they were drafted into military service and were doing their bit the same as we. Outside of these four boys we were at a loss to find out any news of any kind, we could buy no papers, no news or anything, we were out of the reach of everything, so we felt as though we were in a foreign land sure enough. Did I wish that I could speak and understand their language, that would have given a little relief and pastime” (Schoppenhorst, p. 70).

Days in Leurville were spent in rigorous physical training and military drill: “close order, extended order, bayonette drills, maneuvers, nomenclature of the firearms, and not to forget we had plenty of physical exercises to get us in good action ... since it was evident that we would soon go to the front line” (Schoppenhorst, p.73). For many of the men in Company “I”, Sundays were given as days off to rest, attend worship services and to visit a nearby swimming hole in the afternoons, but for the recently drafted men like Martin, Sunday afternoons were opportunities to spend additional time on the rifle range practicing their marksmanship. All the men in the company now also had access to the “fighting equipment” that would be needed in the coming battles – rolling kitchens, automatic rifles, automatic pistols, gas masks, helmets and live grenade detonators – and so much time was spent familiarizing themselves with all of these new items.

In late July the men received their full pay for the time they had been in France so far, and this caused some commotion, “as we received our pay in French francs. Some of the boys had not been paid since they were in service and a little cash looked mighty good to them. But not so good was that the ‘lid was lifted’ here in France: that is, soldiers could buy light drinks, such as beer and wine, and on the sly they would buy stronger liquor such as cognac... Here is where I lost the respect of a good many of my buddies; boys that had been real nice to my estimation at Funston, in fact so far they had been unable to obtain any booze, but now after a chance to fill up with this wretched liquor they were an undesirable bunch. Yet there always were remained some that were clean and sober, men who became real buddies and good associates (editorial comment: Grandpa undoubtedly was one of these). Even our Captain Hanson and several Lieutenants Vogel and Jackson were pretty well liquored, especially one Sunday after payday” (Schoppenhorst, p.81).

End of Section One

Coming Soon in Section 2: Trench warfare and “Over the Top”

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