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FORTY-EIGHTH YEAR

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TWO CENTS

GLORIOUS LETTER FROM WEST FRONT BY "DAVE" MORGAN

Vignoles, France, Nov. 24, 1918 "My Letter to Father"

Dear Old Daddy:-- A couple more letters arrived, so I must make myself useful. Genie writes two, and they are good. Oh, I'm just so happy when mail comes in so fast that I cannot answer it quick enough. Got a large heap here.

Say, kiddo brother, that joke on the English lady was great. I read it to my pals and naturally there was much merriment prevalent within the little ramshackle building of ours that night. Your poem was good. Had a sense of patriotism to it.

Dad, I enclose two papers for your consideration. The one is an official commendation of valorous services rendered by our boys when we were in the valley of the Aire River and the largest forest in France, that forest being the famous Argonne Forest.

My! it sure was some forest. We had rain, too, most every day while located in that dark place of high trees, etc. That region became quite famous in the days of the French Kings, in that whenever one happened to be banished from his throne, said deposed ruler usually made a home for himself in said forest. It would be a most beautiful place to encamp during peace times, but not at the time we were there, I assure you, because we were kept busy driving the Hun therefrom.

No small job, either, for he had held the part we pushed from him for the duration of the war and certainly had it strongly fortified. Trenches and trenches! And some were very well built, too, containing cement walls, etc. And the wire entanglements! Ah! One would imagine there was no end to it when it was being cut away for troops to get through in pursuit of the Boche. We got there though, and the only casualties we suffered were men who contracted pneumonia due to the inclement weather, for as I said before, the weather was very miserable. The mud was inches thick, we used to slide through it at times. My brogans often felt like so much lead when the mud caked on same. These muddy conditions made transportation difficult, causing delays with our artillery as same attempted to move over bad roads. The heavier guns got stuck easily in this peculiar French mud which is like glue.

There is a lot of swearing when moving trains are held up along a road by an automobile, cannon or a heavy wagon being stuck in a ditch or deep mud. An occurrence of the like may seem trivial to you, but when one such vehicle causes congestion sufficient to hold up perhaps hundreds of cannon, etc., behind it, why it means something where minutes are considered hours, you know. There must be no time lost in a drive, if possible. The Hun is ever on the alert for any delays we make. It means so much saving for him; just what he is looking for. Oh, this offensive is a great but costly game.

If you, father, could only be at some safe place near enough to observe these great movements and battles you would be able to make speeches on the events. This would be just the stuff for you to relate to the old Boston Bunluns such as Ned Fowler, Dunagan and the rest of the gang. I'll wager you, father, that Adam Diddy-jung's war stories are a joke in comparison to what the stories of the boys of this struggle will be, when they return. The Civil War as a whole must have been like one of the battles of this struggle.

After having left the Argonne Forest we landed in the ruins of that which was a flourishing town before the war. I don't mention this because of the mere fact of the town being in ruins as there are hundreds of other towns and cities that have undergone the same change. My reason is: It was in this particular town that Marie Antoniette and Louis, the Fifteenth of France, were caught as they were trying to escape to Germany, rather than be guillotined. History says they both lost their heads at that town, which was Varennes, by the way. I am not a historian, therefore, I cannot argue over the town, that was.

The picture I enclose, shows a very good friend of mine as he looked just before being killed by a shell, while he was performing the duties of a soldier, in the vicinity of Varennes. I became acquainted with the chap while we were at Hancock. Since then and up until the day of his untimely end, we were fast friends. He was an Al fellow and I miss him very much.

Shortly after the battle of the Argonne Forest, which lasted from Sept. 23rd to Oct. 10th, we evacuated Varennes for our present location, which has a little on the other place, in that there are more buildings left standing.

I am billeted with our Company clerk in a fairly good building. We use the room we occupy as an office and sleeping quarters and find it very suitable. We have one of those old-time fireplaces wherein there is always a cheerful fire burning. We find the heat of the wood fire to be very comfy these days and nights, as old Man Winter is gradually paying his respects day by day. Each morn, without there is just enough chill in the air to make me hurry to breakfast, which is served in another billet several hundreds yards distant. I carry my meals back to our fire-side 3 times daily. I have gotten so accustomed to the task that I usually get back to my "home" with my supper meal, without losing any of it along the wayside. As it gets dark quite early over here now and as mess is served after dark, you must know, I do good work to not spill my meal all over the dark alleys I must pass through ere I arrive at my destination or, the place I now call "Home."

This I must say for "C" Co., we eat well. If our Mess Sergeant receives honest-to-goodness rations the meals are worth while walking for. The man understands his job which is all that is required when it comes to preparing food for 250 men plus our officers. Since being located at this place I had the privilege of enjoying a seven-day leave of absence to visit a fashionable watering resort situated in the French Alps. The place assumes the name of Aix Les Baines and is a most wonderful place. Prior to the present war, Aix was known as the resort of the nobility of Europe and wealthy American tourists. Such notables as J. P. Morgan and H. K. Thaw having spent much of their time there during their stay in Europe. The main reason why the better classes visited there is on account of its mineral waters and baths.

The city in itself offers very little attraction as it is but a place of hotels. There are no industries that I know of whereby the populace may earn a livelihood. I suppose the custom was, previous to the war, to depend upon tourists for a means of a living. Be that as it may, just a word on the baths, Ah! Remarkable indeed. They are simply wonderful. The building occupies an entire city block, and the interior must be seen to be appreciated.

It contains baths and swimming pools of all sorts. If you desire merely a foot bath you may have it for the asking. On the other hand, if perchance you would rather a swim in a large pool of sulphur water 79 degrees hot, right from the bowels of mother Earth there is one awaiting you. Then there are the vapor baths and I do not know how many other kinds of mineral water baths. It is such a splendid place to get cleaned in that it has been visited by kings and queens of many nations. Perhaps I bathed in one of the pools that the king of Italy swam in during the past. Who knows? When we were on a tour of inspection, we were shown where this Prince and that King used to bathe.

It is not the bathing, so much as the waters, that makes the establishment so important, for the waters are all of some sort of mineral qualities. The mineral properties are chiefly sulphur, which makes same to be of such high medicinal value to the sick or rheumatic, who come from far and near to be benefited by the healing properties, if possible. After I had my bath I noticed that I was quite hungry so the sulphur toned my appetite if nothing else.

After having bathed we were not furnished with towels, instead, we were given a thing, in appearance, similar to an ordinary shirt which we were ordered to throw across our shoulders and promenade around the pool until quite dry, a rather cool way I assure you, nevertheless, it all goes with the bath. The reason you are not allowed to dry yourself is because the rubbing process will rub off the minerals which must be allowed to soak into the pores of the skin else, otherwise they will not prove beneficial. Got the idea? Anyway, custom or no custom, we enjoyed our plunge immensely returning to our hotel for a good dinner, French style, which isn't bad.

As you notice I said hotel. Yes, we were quartered at a magnificent place all at the expense of our good government. It stood all expenses, including railroad fare, which must cost many francs. They ride alone, to the place, required almost two days to see. Railroad rates alone made quite a bill, considering that there were 1,200 of us from one division, without counting those of other divisions.

tainly appreciated the fact. There is a large edifice within the town called "the Casino." It is a very fine structure, a most wonderful place for soldiers to have the use of, during their stay at Aix. It contains a movie theatre, vaudeville house, large writing room (which evidently was used by the wealthy as a card room) a billiard room, lunch room, reception hall, offices, ball room and many other apartments of interest. In each one of those places there is something doing at all times under the supervision of the Y. M. C. A. It costs the government one million dollars per annum for use of the Casino and I am sure the money is not wasted, when I say the boys are tickled foolish to have such a place at their disposal. I certainly was a movie fan whilst there, having attended the picture shows nightly. I also saw very high-class vaudeville; the kind that would claim very best price sin "the States." What did admission cost me? Nothing, of course, our government seeing to all expenses.

In conjunction with the daily programme at the Casino, the "Y" representatives have a daily schedule of mountain climbing. To be sure I missed few of those trips, my first being a hike and climb to the summit of Mt. Chambleto, 3280 feet above sea level. Tho it isn't the loftiest peak of the Alps by any means, nevertheless, the climb is a test of endurance every foot it covered.

After several weary hours of plodding we finally reached the top and for our efforts we were rewarded by a good dinner, Scotch style, prepared by an old Scotch lady, the proprietress of a lone hotel at the top. This old woman proved a very interesting conversationalist. She informed us that she had not been down off the mountain in 18 years, due to the hard climb back again. She is never lonesome, tho, as tourists and soldiers are forever visiting her hotel. She has prepared dinner for such people as the Empress of Austria, the King of Italy and many other persons of the nobility. Such people, when touring the French Alps in that locality never fail to pay their respects, consequently, she has been quite honored in her time. I enjoyed my conversation with the old woman. I told her that you were born in Wales and about where, and of course, she knew all about the place. At last it was time for us to bid her farewell and so we commenced our ticklish descent to terra firma or, to the base of the step mountain. I got down without losing anything except my breath, and started on my hike of 12 miles back to my hotel.

The following day there was a trip to Mt. Revard, the highest peak in that locality. I registered for it even tho my muscle of my body was sore from the climb of the preceding day. Fortunately, there was a cog railroad running to convey us there else I think I would have counted myself out on that climb. That ride over that road was sensational and thrilling. The grade was on an average 30 degrees and in some spots even 45 degrees if not more. There would be no chance for the passengers if the cogs would be stripped. The higher we climbed the more creepy we felt for the mountain is 5080 feet high, almost a mile of a drop had there been a mishap. A most wonderful sight met our eyes at the top. When we gazed down towards the town we had to wait until the clouds below us had sailed by. Imagine it! Above the clouds, why an aviator had nothing on us when scenery was taken into consideration. I never before saw such remarkable and beautiful scenery. As we gazed off in one direction we could easily discern the Alps of Switzerland in the distance; in another direction, the Italian Alps were visible to the naked eye and last, but not least, directly before us, only 45 miles away, rose old Mt. Blanc in all her glory, towering to the skies to a distance of approximately three miles. A noble work of God indeed. It's peak is perpetually covered by ice and snow and is a very picturesque sight to behold, when the sun shines on the mountain. As most of the mountains are miles high, all are covered with ice and snow the year around especially Mt. Blanc which is the highest peak in Europe.

We only had a few minutes to take in the beautiful sights because a large cloud passed over our high position obscuring the entire view until it was time to make our descent to civilization. Anyway, I had observed enough, during the few minutes I had, to remember the rest of my life. I have seen for nothing, what tourists spent much money to see, and I am quite satisfied. While on the summit of Mt. Revard I noticed that the high altitude affects the breathing, the light air making me feel sort of short of breath. I also noticed, on those higher mountains, just where the timberland terminated. Plant life exists to a certain height, then all is bare for a certain area, and from there to

the top, there is nothing but the ice and snow. Such works of nature, are left for botanists and geologists to explain, hence, except for my inquisitiveness regarding the matter, suffice it to say, I drop the subject. While I was still at Aix, the good news arrived which stated that the Armistice was signed and that hostilities would cease. It all happened so suddenly that the truth was almost inconceivable, especially of the French inhabitants of the town. They who had undured this war for four long and weary years were not easily convinced of the fact.

Even when we Americans took the initiative and paraded the streets behind our band, they stood idly by with sort of half smiles upon their faces wondering what it was all for but when they were at last forced into the truth, talk about a demonstrative race of people. My! Those Frenchies have it all over us when it comes to celebrating the end of the great war. Why they became so frantic with joy that men, women and children alike, just simply smothered we U. S. soldiers with kisses, first on one cheek and then on the other. I used to think "Old Home Week" at Mahanoy City was some celebration. So it was but it was nothing in comparison to the joy and merriment that ensued at Aix Les Baines that day of all days. In the night parade, even soldiers in hospitals who were able to walk, promenaded up and down the streets. It was a touching sight to see a wounded soldier, with the aid of his nurse, trying to keep up with the crowds in parade.

In one way I would like to have been on the lines with my company, when orders came for to cease firing. Then again, I am glad I was afforded the opportunity to participate in a real French celebration having heard how demonstrative those people are when enthused over glorious news. When I returned to the front everything seemed so quiet and peaceful that I thought I was still at Aix. Not a gun boomed, not a rifle shot could be heard. And better still, no aeroplanes were overhead with their deadly and destructive bombs, hence, there was little to fear. We could, at last, enjoy a peaceful night of sleep, even though it was in ruined buildings, etc.

My pals who were on the lines when the orders arrived, related many incidents of interest to me, which made me feel sorry I was not on hand, at the time begin. As soon as it was over the Fritzes came over to our positions to make friends, if possible. After the instructions, etc., were over with, the Huns offered souvenirs to the boys in exchange for food and tobacco. There were some fine transactions carried on, for instance, one of our boys agreed to give a certain Jerry a package of cigarettes provided Fritz would come across with his watch. The bargain was made anyway, the watch is a dandy.

The Dutchies are glad it is over with and are glad to return home, i. e., those who are left. As the German troops had a limited time to evacuate occupied territory, it did not take them very long to get out and the Allied troops kept right behind them. At present our troops must be strengthened all along the Rhine River. As our division was not chosen for one army of occupation, i. e., as we were not one of the divisions picked to chase up the Huns and occupy the territory evacuated by them, we are at present located at the same where we were when the fighting ceased, Vignelles being the place. We are in what was the Thiaucourt Sector, our position being about nine miles from Metz while fighting was going on, and now about 27 miles from the German stronghold in Lorraine.

The signing of the Armistice prevented our taking Metz, nevertheless, Armistice or no Armistice, we are going to take it from the Huns at any cost. We had our guns shooting on the forts while our infantry gained forward gradually, getting closer each day. It was a stiff fight in this sector while it lasted while the Huns had concentrated their picked divisions in this locality in an attempt to ward off the onslaught of the Americans, cost what it may. Be that as it may, we were determined to show the Hun that we could take the city from him, and so it was. You can imagine for yourself what fighting ensued, with either side determined to fight to the finish, at any cost. I've heard that Pershing said he would take Metz in three days once he started his drive, if it cost thousands of men, so you see what a place it was, to be in, once we got started. In the meantime, the Hun decided to call it quits and so it came to pass that there was not too much blood spilled over that city. What made the place so important was the fact if its being the center of the iron fields of Germany. Without Metz and its iron fields Germany would not be able to last long for she depended upon these fields to keep her ammunition works supplied. With her iron mines taken from her the

factories would become paralyzed, likewise her artillery in the field, and as she depended upon artillery to win the war, you thus can perceive at a glance, of what great import these mines were to her. Her cannon without fodder would be useless as it were. Taking these facts into consideration, one can readily see what a struggle to all belligerents, it would have been, had not diplomacy intervened at the critical moment.

While we are here awaiting the results of the anticipated peace negotiations the Engineers have not been idly nor out of danger for we have been engaged in the very hazardous work of cleaning up battlefields which means the destroying of all traps and mines laid by the enemy. When we started to work we realized how well fortified the Germans had the ground in the vicinity of Metz. They had 8 inch mines planted only a metre apart, which was meant for our tanks, when the attack was made, plus man traps arranged one foot apart for our troops. There certainly would have been many lives lost in an attempt to gain this mine ground. So numerous were those mines, that in one day, our company alone, removed eight hundred in and without a loss of life or an accident. Another company of our regiment, did not fare out as well. They had five men blown to atoms whilst removing one mine and another company lost two men in taking a detonator from a mine. Thus you see that even with hostilities at a standstill, our boys faced many dangers. For this work the Engineers have picked men, fellows who are familiar in the handling of explosives, these chaps being mostly mining men. It is a job that requires skilled hands. Jack McDonald was in the group of chaps from our company, who performed the dangerous work. All we had to go by in removing the mines was a map of their location, furnished by a German Officer, so we had to use great care.

At this writing, I am in receipt of, since I wrote you last, ten letters from home. There are, the two from Eugene dated Sept. 20th and 27th; one from John dated Sept. 20; six from mother dated Oct. 3rd, 8th, 14th, 24th, 30th, and one dated Nov. 4th; being excellent from mother) and one from Anna on Oct. 27th. I think this is a fine average from home. The news within was very interesting indeed better than a newspaper to me, I'll say.

Along with the above mail, I received some handkerchiefs, postal view of Mahanoy City, newspaper clippings, Harry's photographs, the tin box containing chocolate and Salt Water Taffy. It seems when my mail comes it arrives in bunches. Just so I received same I don't care how it arrives. I also received the Philadelphia Press. Hence, you see, though late as the things come, they nevertheless arrive I'm here to state that the second box of candy certainly was appreciated by myself as well as my friends.

I suppose the box from Gimble's will float in the near future. My Xmas coupon must have arrived at home ere this. According to the amount of boxes that are being shipped to me by other people, I will hardly need a Xmas box. No matter how much does come I assure you, none will be wasted up here where candies are unknown.

Harry looks stunning on the pictures. I'm afraid he has me beaten for looks as a soldier. On the other hand he will have to go some to beat my record of experiences. I do not know of any soldier of Boston Run who can boast or having gone through what I have during the last five months. I started in at Chateau-Thierry and finished at Metz being in most every drive we pulled over during the past five months. Our four campaigns during that period are as follows: The The Fifth German offensive from July 14th to 27th; the advance on the Ourcq and Vesle River lasting from July 28th to Sept. 7th; the Meuse-Argonne offensive from Sept. 26th to Oct. 7th; and the present one we were in when the fight was called off, it being called that of the Thiaucourt Sector which lasted from Oct. 15th to Nov. 11th or the day of the signing of the Armistice, which, if you remember, occurred on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month. Quite an easy way to recall the eventful date.

In studying the above dates you will note that in five months there was little rest for us. On our first trip to the front, we made good by driving the Hun from strong positions, and so it came to pass, that we became there after what are known as "shock" troops, i. e., the kind who drive a wedge here in the enemy's lines then go to another front and do the same thing. This work keeps a Shock Division always on the move from front to front and also brings the Division into action on most every front of France. True, such a Division is apt to have heavy losses, if the enemy offers much resistance, even so, you make a name for yourself. We are

one of what are known as the eighth Red Division, that being the case, we naturally must wear a mark of distinction which is a crimson colored emblem worn upon the left sleeve of the coat. Ours is the shape of a Keystone, the emblem of our state. Whenever you see this insignia upon the arm of a soldier, you will know that he is a member of one of the famous fighting divisions. You will know the mark by its red color. The numbers of these divisions are the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th of the Regular Army and the 26th, 32nd, 42nd, and ours, the 28th, all National Guard Divisions. During the entire fight, our division never retreated. We gained our objectives every time, hence, you got to hand it to the boys from Pennsylvania.

I imagine when the news concerning the Armistice, was received, the folks back there went mad. Well, the Pa. people have something to go mad over because those boys were never known to run since they were in the fray.

So Harry has sailed for Cuba. Glad to hear that. He is better off down here where it is warm, than over here where it is growing colder daily. He would not like the climate here. This is a country of plenty rainy weather. Just now, the rains are of the raw or chilly type. I don't know when we will have snow but I suppose when it does come it will be a sort of half rain and snow. Course when it does come it will not get a fellow anywhere to be pessimistic over inclement weather conditions. Each fellow will have to make the best of it all by thinking of brighter days ahead. Longfellow in his poem called "Rainy Days" said, "Be still sad heart and cease repining, for behind each cloud 's the sun still shining; Thy fate is but the common fate of all, into the lives of each mortal, some rain must fall: Some days must be dark and dreary, etc." Although Longfellow has another meaning to his poem. Nevertheless, it sorts of makes a weather crank sit up and take notice once he has digested its contents.

I am proud to know that my helmet was appreciated. It was not an easy matter to gain possession of same. I have a steel helmet in my possession but cannot ship same through not having any U. S. stamps to pay postage on same. There is a new ruling regarding the shipment of such trophies to the States. It is to ship things home, each soldier must have in his possession, the necessary postage for payment on same which is almost impossible. Why a postage stamp to us boys is as scarce as water is to an African Desert. However, it will not be any trouble for me to keep the helmet until such time as I can get sufficient postage to defray expenses. Folweller shipped his prior to the new rule. Quite fortunate.

He and McDonald are as well as can be expected. In fact you would never think, to see both, that they were very sick only recently. Bill Lynch has returned from the hospital and is none the worse from his experiences except that he has a large scar where the shrapnel had penetrated his arm. We are receiving many of our boys back daily who had been at hospitals to have wounds and gas burns treated. Many fellows return who were gassed. Soon we will have all the old members of the company back. Lt. Reese, my Lt. is still in the hospital. I presume you have read in the Pottsville papers of Lt. Woodbury having been killed in action. He was killed while we were at Fismes. Note I give mention of places we fought at. We are allowed to now as the censorship is not so rigid since things have taken on a brighter aspect.

I forgot to mention that Harry, prior to his departure wrote me twice. I cannot answer same until he arrives in Cuba.

I was very much concerned over the "flu" epidemic that was so prevalent back there. I hope the ravages of the disease have subsided by this time. It hit our relation rather hard. I wonder if John Collins knows of his father's sudden calling off. I never see John. He was engaged in the hauling of ammunition to us while we were at Varennes during Oct., and he tried to see me ere he got away but was unable. I saw Lewis Tulin. (Hebrew) and it was he who told me of Johnnie's presence in our locality. He wasn't so funny up there, as usual. Shells take all the fun out of people. Youch, Doyle and Tulin are in the same ammunition train as Johnnie so he has some friends in his outfit.

Katie Crossen has my sympathy. Thomas Ryan was a chap of sterling qualities, a chap anyone would miss. The "flu" was killing people over there as fast as bullets and shells were killing soldiers over here and for the good of everybody I am glad both reapers of death are about at death's door.

The old homestead certainly must have undergone quite a change since I saw it last.

The other day, as the 3rd Division was passing through our town, I had

the pleasure of a short chat with Joe Monaghan's brother, James, who is in the Medical Corps of that Division. You ever see Joe mention the map to him. Jimmie looks fine. His division was enroute to somewhere along the Rhine as a part of the army of occupation.

At present I am working as a clerk at our Divisional Statistical Office and I like the work very much. In this place there is a representative from almost every company in the division, and when all of us bang away on the typewriters you would think that you were in some big newspaper office. There must be 40 clerks in this room and it is the place where the paper work is handled systematically. A bunch of work is cleaned up here each day. Most all of the company paper work is handled here for the entire Division which is some pile. I am about seven miles from my company, hence, I eat and sleep here. I cannot complain about the meals, for we feed as well, if not better, than at the company.

I hope this letter reaches you for Christmas, if so, I wish you a Merry Xmas and a Happy New Year. It is my wish that your physical condition will be such as to allow you to enjoy the holiday season.

To mother and the kiddos I wish the same. I will write mother a letter in a few days hence.

My love to all. DAVID

(We received the following commendation for our work in the Meuse-Argonne offensive): Headquarters 103rd Engineers American Expeditionary Forces, France, October 21, 1918 General Orders, No. 41.

1. The commanding officer, 103rd Engineers takes great pleasure in publishing to this regiment the following letter from the Chief of Staff, 28th Division: Headquarters 28th Division American Expeditionary Forces October 20, 1918 From: Chief of Staff. To: Colonel F. A. Snyder, 103rd Eng. Subject: Commendation.

1. The Division Commander desires me to convey to you and through you, to the officers and soldiers in your regiment his appreciation of the excellent work performed during the recent offensive in the Valley of the Aire and the Argonne Forest.

2. From the time that your advance parties were pushed forward to repair and reconstruct the roads across "No Man's Land," which were so necessary at the start to insure a supply of munitions and food, until the final order to withdraw was given your command has shown a devotion to duty that merits the highest commendation. The opening of the narrow gauge railroad, using the enemy's locomotive, and the construction of a bridge over the Aire at Chehery was especially noteworthy.

3. Your untiring zeal has given your men an example which have followed, and which has made the Regiment a unit which it is felt may be depended upon under any conditions. W. C. SWEENEY, Chief of Staff

2. This order will be published to all companies and detachments. By order of COLONEL SNYDER, EDW. A. WARNER, JR., Capt. 103rd Engineers, Adjt.

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