

Merle D. Parker, World War I soldier

Around 1919, the Kansas State Historical Society and the American Legion solicited biographical information from returning veterans (primarily members of the 35th and 89th infantry divisions) and the families of those who died in service, notably from the Gold Star Mothers. Each veteran or family member was asked to provide letters, photographs, a biography, and military records. This file contains information on Merle D. Parker, Military Police, 35th Division.

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A SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF MERLE D. PARKER.

Corporal Merle D. Parker was born in Sterling, Rice County, Kansas on March 22nd, 1895. His father was the Rev. Aaron Holmes Parker and was at that time the Pastor of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Sterling. His mother's maiden name was Mary Francis Smith.

Corporal Parker received most of his education in the schools of the City of Wichita; in fact all of it with the exception of ten months that he attended the Public school in California during a visit he made there with his mother immediately after his father's death in April, 1908. After completing the High School course in Wichita High School he entered Friends University and had almost completed the Sophomore year of this Institution when he joined a local National Guard Company in May 1916.

He spent his summers working on a farm and for a few months prior to his enlistment had been writing insurance with the Connecticut Mutual Insurance Company.

Corporal Parker is a direct descendant of soldiers of the Revolutionary War through both parents. His father served four years, three months and eighteen days in the Union Army during the Civil war and was a Sergeant in a Colorado Cavalry company at the time of his discharge. His grandfather, Levi Smith was also a soldier in the Union Army.

Two brothers of Corporal Parker are also with the A. E. F. Rollo F. Parker of the 7th Field Hospital, 3rd Division and Walter W. Parker in Y. M. C. A. work.

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EXTRACTS FROM LETTERS OF CORPORAL MERLE D. PARKER OF 35th DIVISION MILITARY POLICE.

Ft. Sill, Okla.
Sept. 26. 1917

Will not have time to write much as we are busy as can be. It was sure cold last night but I warmed up the bunch this morning when I gave them the usual morning exercises.

I made a table for our tent yesterday and I am writing on it now. It has a real drawer and a shelf underneath. The top is made of flooring and is smooth as a floor toe.

Ft. Sill, Okla.
Oct. 10, 1917.

We sure have been living high for the last few days. Dale Gritser and Oren Rush received boxes from home and we have been living high. Dale got two fried chickens, apples, pickles, tomatoes, two large jars of jelly and a big cake, candy and blue plums. I got a notice from the P. O. today that there was two cents due on a package and if that is not from you please get busy.

I am helping Dale this P. M. invoicing his supplies and so I get out of drill. We drill one day, ~~leaf~~ on guard one day and leaf one day. Leaf means clean up, wash, take a bath, clean out our tents, ect.

I sure like this army life and I have gained fifteen pounds since Aug. 5. The only thing I don't like is the associates but Dale, Rush and I are together most of the time. Our chief game is checkers. Rush is the best but Dale and I make it pretty hot for him.

About seven of us went to the Y. M. last night for church. We enjoyed ourselves and are going again next Thursday evening.

Ft. Sill, Okla.
Oct. 14, 1917.

I was in charge of quarters last night and my duty was to see that everybody was in bed by ten o'clock. I only caught twenty one last night and their names were turned in and they have some extra work to do. That is the hard part of a Corporal's duties, whenever he turns in any one the person who is caught naturally gets sore and a good Corporal is bound to have enemies and I am getting my share

Ft. Sill, Okla.
Nov. 1, 1917.

At present we are not doing much of anything. We have three thousand horses to feed and that keeps us busy.

We will move tomorrow to Camp Donniphan which is about four miles from here. We will then take up the duties of U. S. Military Police. We will guard the camp and help keep order in the towns near here.

Camp Donniphan,
Nov. 22, 1917.

In every department the companies are constantly increasing their drilling hours. The Infantry takes a night hike every week, and during the hike not a man is allowed to whisper, light a match or in any manner make an alarm. Two of the "doughboys" were thrown into the Guard House for talking during one of these night

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maneuvers. The Signal Corps can put up a wireless station and be ready to receive or send messages in five minutes time. The Artillery companies are firing on the ranges every day and it is nothing uncommon to hear the schrapnel shells burst on the hillsides about two miles from here. The Aviation corps are flying all day long even on windy days. Our Company is going on the range now for target practice so you see every thing points toward action.

Camp Donniphan,
January 26, 1918.

Our Company is to be fully equiped within a few days and we will then be real Military Police. Just to show you how much we have to take care of I will give you a list of what we are held responsible for.

Two shirts, four undershirts, two sweaters, two blouses, four pr. pants, four pr. drawers, six pr. socks, 1pr leggins, three pr. shoes, 1 hat and hatcord, three blankets and one each of all the following; overcoat, slicker, quilt, tick, cot, shelter half, mess kit, rifle, rifle case, revolver, ammunition belt, horse, horse-blanket, nose bag, saddle, saddle blanket, saddle bag, gun boot, bridle, halter curry comb, curry brush.

I may have omitted a few articles but you can see we have our hands full and in addition to this I have seven men and my tent to take care of.

Lawton,
Jan. 29, 1918.

I am at present in the city of Lawton enjoying myself and at the same time running down crooks, bootleggers, ect. I havn't much of that kind of work to do. Just now my duty is to post the guard and kill time. I sleep in the First National Bank where the government money is kept. We have guards there all the time.

This noon I was sent to the Frisco Depot to watch for soldiers leaving without pass. Another job we have is to keep the, out of picture shows, also we clear the streets at 11:30.

Mother, I thank you for the \$5 bill, it sure came in handy but don'tl last long. To prove it will quote a few prices we have to pay here. I started with \$11.60; spent the .60 to celebrate pay day, payed a debt of \$4.00, bought a pair of leggins for \$4.00 and that left \$3.00. I went to town and carfare was 40¢; when in town got the following; dinner, 70¢; two towels, 40¢; tooth brush, 25¢; shaving cream, 25¢; chevrons, 50¢; hat cleaned and blocked, 50¢; candy, 25¢; shoes shined, 15¢. When I returned to town a five spot was naturally ruined. So you see how hard it is to get along on \$11.00 a month but will still try it.

Lawton, Okla.
Feb. 2, 1918.

I have some good news, we get seven days on a pass and my name is tenth on the list.

I witnessed an Army funeral this afternoon. They were shipping the bodies of two soldiers to their homes. A band was lined up at the depot and as the train pulled in the band began to play "Nearer my God to Thee" and continued until the coffins were loaded. The Bugler played taps as the train pulled out.

Camp penniphan,
March 13, 1918.

We sure had a keen ride yesterday afternoon; went over to the trenches about ten miles east of our camp on patrol duty. We were practicing patrol and believe me it is some sport.

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Ft. Sill, Okla.
March 22, 1918.

Dear Ones All :-

A letter every day while I am in quarantine is my motto. Did you know about it? No ofcourse you did not as have only been in for 12 hours. I intended to go to Oklahoma City tomorrow and had everything fixed up fine and this morning as I was just getting ready to go out to drill the man in charge of quarters came down to the tent and told me that my squad was quarantined for diptheria. Frizella, a cook who sleeps in my tent is now in the hospital with diptheria. I am not worried as I have had one shot for "dip" and got another today and will get another in a few days. It sure dont feel very good to ~~have~~ have that little needle stuck into you and now my shoulder is getting mighty sore. They stick you right on the shoulder blade. The doctor also swabbed our throats with some kind of dope and will be back in the morning. Have sure had my fill of quarantine but is restful in the morning especially when Reville sounds, "We wont get up, we wont get up, we wont get up

Last Sunday I went to Elgin, a small town about 18 miles from here, on Provost duty. I had a nice trip but was sure sore the next day. We send a detail over there every week end to catch A. W. O. L. and soldiers without passes. We had four leave A. W. O. L. last Monday.

I took four of our men to the "Nut Specialist" yesterday and they certainly pulled off some bright remarks. The Doctor told one to put these words in a sentence river, lake, ~~desert~~ desert. After thinking for some time he said, "The river runs into the lake and the lake into the desert." I managed to keep my face straight but 'twas hard work.

Ft. Sill, Okla.
April, 3, 1918.

Dear Ones All :-

Have just returned from what will probably be my last horseback ride in Ft. Sill and am sure glad of it as the dust is fierce as usual and perhaps a little worse today. We have shipped our horses.

Yes we are preparing to leave but it probably wont be for several days and may be two or three weeks. Part of the Infantry leaves to night and thru the entire Division the slow work of packing is going on. One nice thing is that Dale will be with me as he comes back to the Company Thursday as a Sargeant and not as Supply Sargeant. He did not like the supply job. He did not get a Commission but goes to the next Officers Training Camp which starts June 1st will be held "somewhere in France".

Ft. Sill,
April 8, 1918.

Not gone yet but can't tell how soon. Are packing just as fast as possible and getting everything in shape. Soldiers are leaving here every day and when our time comes, "Goodby Broadway, Hello France".

We were issued about forty drafted men today which puts our organization up to war strength. Havn't talked to any of them yet but from information I have been able to gather they are from the pakotas and have been in the Service about six weeks. They appear to be a fairly good bunch.

Ft. Sill,
April 11, 1918.

We are still here but the boys are leaving all the time and our time may be next. We have nearly all our equipment packed.

I am so nervous I can hardly write. Have just been running a two hundred and antwenty yard dash and took first place without much trouble and believe me, I'm



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about all in.

I told you about our Sweeds. The Captain asked one if he was born in this country; he said, "No Ay bane born in Min-na-so-ta. The boys have sport hearing them talk. Thirtyfour of them and all farmers. A husky bunch they are and well disciplined and the Captain likes them too.

Ft. Sill, Okla.
April 15, 1918.

The boys are leaving fast now. Three regiments of infantry have gone and one more to go. Then comes the Engineers, Signal Corps, Ammunition train, sanitary train, Artillery and Military Police. Which one of these mentioned is first no one knows. It begins to look as if we might be last but we can't tell. One day rumor says we go and the next that we ~~ga~~ stay here. But I think next Sunday will find us on the way. I was just down where they are loading and the porter told me that this Division goes to Hoboken New Jersey but how does he know? Also that we are all to be moved by Saturday.

Ft. Sill, Okla.
April 18, 1918.

Wednesday and no signs of leaving yet but there is no doubt that we are ready to go.

Yesterday we had field inspection and every thing had to be in our blanket roll, barracks bag, or saddle bag. In my saddle bag I had mess kit, stationary, chessmen, toilet articles, polishing outfit, and various other things. In our blanket roll three blankets, one complete change of clothing, and slicker. We had to carry our overcoats. In my barracks bag I had ~~thene~~ pr. socks including y th those four pair you made, extra blouse, underwear, two scarfs, helmet, two sweaters fatigue clothes, bed sack, leather leggins, and numerous other things. I had it just as full as it could be. Barracks bag is shipped and we never see it till we reach the other side.

~~Ft. Sill, Okla.~~
April 21, 1918

Will keep you posted concerning details of our trip. At present we are about seventyfive miles from St. Louis and have been on the way just twenty four hours. All day have been traveling through the Ozarks and it certainly is a pretty country.

Our meals are brought to us and we have only two a day while enroute; breakfast at nine and supper at five.

I am on guard at the present time. We have twentythree prisoners at the present ant that is why we have to post a guard.

At Springfield Missouri we took a thirty minute hike. Everyday we have a short hike for exercise. I am tired of traveling already and have several days ahead yet. The dope is that we go from St. Louis to Chicago, to Detroit, Buffalo and then into Canada and finally Camp Mills.



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Camp Mills, New York.
April 24, 1918.

Well I am here and glad of it too. We certainly had hard luck traveling. Every town of much importance we passed through some time during the night. My first disappointment was in failing to see the Mississippi River and St. Louis. For some reason we missed the larger cities possibly due to the heavy traffic.

We pulled into Buffalo New York about seven A. M. but the Red Cross were waiting for us with cigarettts and candy. I traded cigarettts for candy. We took a ten minute walk but didn't see much of the place. I forgot to mention that at Detroit the Red Cross served us with Sandwiches.

We arrived at Scranton about dark and proceeded for a short walk up town. We were greeted with applause all the way. It is noticeable that the further east we go the more patriotism is shown. When we returned to our train sandwiches were waiting for us served again by the Red Cross. Just after leaving the station two of our prisoners jumped out the window and made good their escape. One has been picked up by the police already and the other likely will be.

Somewhere in England.

We arrived safely and in good spirits and are now traveling thru England which without doubt the prettiest country we have seen so far and I would like to stay around a few days but we will move on soon.

Our trip across was uneventful in the way of any submarine attack. I felt so safe I even wished a ~~submarine~~ sub would appear so we could have seen what would have seen what would have happened.

We had great sport on the boat. The Y. M. furnished us moving pictures and games of all kind including some fine Boxing and Wrestling matches in which we were always winners.

The trains are queer looking here, small freight cars about sixteen ft. long; coaches divided into sections accomodating eight ~~passengers~~ passengers.

Later and somewhere in France. Well here we are; were in England about five days and are now safe in France. Our trip to France was one I certainly can never forget the the return trip will no doubt be much more the merrier.

The people give us a most hearty welcome and we are fed all along the way. The French lingo is the limit and the money is even worse. We are to take up our old work and are to be mounted, and believe me the M. Ps. certainly hate the soft snap in the Army if there is such a thing.

Somewhere in France, June 1, '18

We are doing the same kind of work here and at present both companies are on duty in the several towns near here. We are ~~also~~ also traffic cops which seems to be a mighty responsible job here, especially near the front.

Somewhere in France,
July 11, 1918.

Last night we had a little trouble with a couple of infantrymen who were heavy laden with wine. Nine o'clock is closing hour and they refused to leave the cafe and started a fight. The M. P. came out on top and finally succeeded in putting them under



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arrest and the French Guard locked them up for the night.

The French are very accomodating to us and give us free use of their Y. M. and writing paper. They usually have an entertainment every evening and when I am not too busy I attend. These Frenchmen are great on singing and in the evening they gather in the cafe and put on a regular opera.

The Wichita Infantry are back from the trenches and they tell many interesting stories of the trench life. They did not lose a man.

France, July 21, 1918.

At present I am where the shells make sweet music as they sing over our heads Yesterday morning I had a reserve seat to watch a real battle. We are on a hill and the Dutch, Bosh, Jerry or Germans are located in the valley. We have several other pet names for the Germans but it would hardly do to write them here.

We had a tip that something was going to happen so when we heard our guns open fire early one morning we dressed in a rush and made onther rush for our observation platform. It was just like a moving picture show only the real thing. We were not close enough to see how many were killed or wounded or to see any movement of our men as they charged over the top and into the German lines. But we could plainly see the Artillery fire as it gradually raised its fire to allow the Infantry to charge. Every now and then we could hear a machine gun or German typewriter as we call them. It was early dawn and the bursting shells and rockets made a U. S. Fourth of July look tame. It made a mental picture in my mind I can never forget but is hard to describe as one must actually be present to realize such a hell like picture.

When we first came up I had never heard the sound made by a shell passing over head. But the Corporal I relieved was very familiar with it as he had one to explode about twenty paces from him. We were standing near a road one morning discussing various subjects when all of a sudden the Corporal mentioned above said, "Beat it fellows here comes one", and he was gone like a shot to a dugout about fifty paces away. It didn't take us long to realize our danger as we now heard a strange but familiar sound to a soldier. The shell passed over our heads hitting about a quarter of a mile above us. Five more hissed over us and after a lapse of ten minutes we came out of the dugout and continued our journey up hill and passed the very spot the shells had hit a few minutes ago before. The shells make a hole similar to one left by a large tree when pulled up by the roots. The morning before the same place was shelled and one American was fatally injured. He was Sgt. Sutton of Wichita, he died on the way to the Hospital.

When you read this you will probably worry about my safty but don't worry as I am perfectly safe as we use every precaution possible, & hunting our dugouts at the least chance of danger. Gas is seldom used here on account of the hills and high altitude.

By the time you receive this letter I will without doubt be back behind the lines again as we are relieved every now and then.

Our duties here are to regulate traffic, make report of troop movement, see that all men are armed and have their gas mask and helmet on, and to allow no troops to halt in an open place.

July 31.

The blame Dutch woke me up in the middle of the night last night shooting their fireworks and they made things pretty lively for a time but not much damage done. Only one of our boys happend to be where a shell hit. Whenever the shells get too thick we go into the dugout for protection.



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Aug. 14, 1918.

Well! we have had lots of excitement. The last time I wrote I was complaining that there was nothing to write about but last night we had what might be called a narrow escape. It happened about 3 A. M. and naturally I was sound asleep when all of a sudden I heard something ~~was~~ which woke me in an instant and I hit the floor and slipped on my pants and shoes, grabbed my gas mask and a couple of blankets and started for a dugout.

I had reached a point about three feet from the door of our billet when crash ! bang! and another shell exploded just above our billet sending schrapnel in all directions. Two hit the door of our billet and several plowed thru the roof. Luckily I was not where one hit but one of the boys was struck on the shoulder but not seriously injured. I can't describe the feeling that went over me when I heard the second crash. It certainly is a peculiar one.

It required only a few seconds to reach the dugout where we remained a half hour or so. It was then beginning to get daylight so we began to look around for souvenirs. The buildings were riddled and the little round bullets were scattered here and there. I have one which we dug out of the door of our billet. Well it's all over now so what is the use to worry?

I made my first trip to the front line trenches yesterday and was where I could peep through a hole and see the German trenches about one to two hundred yards down the hill. I persuaded a guard to let me use his gun and took a shot at what we thought was a German. I had no idea of hitting anything but wanted the satisfaction of firing at least one shot at the Dutch. The trenches are remarkable and would like to tell you many things about them.

We had a splendid view of Germany from this particular post and could see for miles across the wide plains. It was a peaceful scene at this time but when the Artillery opens up one would think he was transferred into another world. A shell plays tricks similar to a cyclone and the trees are literally stripped in places.

One of the boys just dug up a piece of shell which went thru a board which lay directly in front of our billet. I happened to be standing about six feet from the spot where it hit.

We had a rare treat Monday. The Chaplain secured some real American chocolate candy and we had a regular feast eating all we could. The Y. M. is also getting supplies now so we can buy things every day now.

P.S. Aug. 15. We were shelled for two hours last night and spent most of the night in our dugouts.

Aug 20, 1918.

It has been nearly a week since I wrote last. Am in the valley again and living in great style now. Every night about six we eat supper in a restaurant. Last night our menu was, Ham and eggs, lettuce salad, French fried potatoes, bread, jam and pear sauce.

I receive the "Eagle" but they come in bunches. There has been no excitement since I have been here, consequently nothing to write about. The 130 Field Artillery arrived in town yesterday



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Somewhere in France,
Aug. 25, 1918.

Sunday once again but if one were to walk down the street and watch the people he would never guess what day it is. Only two or three little things happen that indicate the day; the ringing of the church chimes and the people going to church, the few who do. All the stores are open as usual and in the Army we are as busy as ever. Breakfast is an hour late and we have no drill but there is enough necessary work to keep one busy most of the time.

I failed to get up in time for breakfast this morning as I was late in going to bed and was up again from three to four. When I did get up I walked down to the main corner to buy something and my breakfast consisted of one pound of tomatoes and three francs worth of grapes which were fine. The tomatoes here have a peculiar but pleasant flavor and only a few seeds; in fact they might be called seedless.

The other day we had dinner at Hotel Jeffree which is named for Gen. Jeffree, who stopped there for dinner in the year of 1914. Fried eggs and potatoes, beef, bread and jam. They sure serve in great style and the cook is A No. 1.

Battery F. is with us now. There will be something doing when the American Artillery begins to work on Jerry. The French don't furnish us with enough excitement.

Aug. 29, 1918.

We have a hint that we might move soon but we never arrive at a new location but that there is always talk of moving soon. Old "Jerry" has stopped out mail and I have received no letters for over two weeks.

I heard a couple of good ones the other day and will pass them on. An Irishman went over the top and met a German in No Man's land. The German answered his challenge in this manner, "Komerad, Komerad, I have a wife and ten children." "You're a liar," yelled the Irishman, "Ye have a widow and ten orphans." The same Irishman arrived in the enemy's trench and approaching an open door of a dugout called to those within, "How many be there in thar?" "Thirteen" came the reply. "Well here's one hand grenade divide it among the hull of ye."

I have a new job now and like it fine. Am in charge of the guard over a dump near here. I visit each relief during the night and am off in the daytime.

Sept. 7, 1918.

Have been too busy to write for nearly a week and to prove my claim will relate the happenings of the past few days. We were in a town and expected to go out sometime during the night so couldn't unroll our packs and had to sleep the best we could. I didn't even go to sleep myself. We rode on the train untill about 4 P. M. the next day and then hiked ten miles, arriving at our billets about ten P. M. Believe me! we were certainly some tired bunch and for the first time some had to drop out. I managed to make the trip but don't believe I was ever so tired before in my life. I forgot to mention that we breakfasted at 2:45 in the morning and it was some drag from 2 A. M. to 10 P. M. But am feeling fine now as have two nights sleep and a square meal.

I can't say much about our trip as it seems to be the same old France everywhere. We did see troops of all nations along the way, including a number of German prisoners.

We are taking life easy now and have nothing to do but eat, sleep and stand reveille at 6 A. M. Yesterday we went to the river and took a swim. It was pretty cold but when I once dived in, couldn't leave. Think I must go and try it again.

In the paper I see the names of several acquaintances who are drafted and again I say I'm glad I didn't wait even to register.



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Sept. 13, 1918.

We have been on the move again and are at present where we can hear the roar the guns once more. It has been raining almost continually for the last ten days and our last hike was of five hours duration through a drizzling rain and at its end we had to pitch our tents in a forest and I was soaked to the skin.

When ready for bed I took off all my wet clothes and slept till morning. I had no dry clothes except one suit of underwear and a pair of socks. I put on my wet shoes and pants and nearly froze. But this P. M. the sun came out and I am nearly dry once more.

Have been in a real town once more and rode on a street car for the first time in four months. Rush and I went in together about 10 A. M. and after strolling the streets for a while we located a Y. M. C. A. I naturally inquired for Walter and several had met a Mr. Parker but further inquiries disclosed the fact that he had left that morning so I just missed him. I'm not sure this Mr. Parker was Walter but their description of him leads me to believe so.

We ate dinner at a hotel and then went to a Moving Picture Show and saw Miss Vernon Castle. It seemed like home to go to a Moving Picture show. We spent the remainder of the time walking about visiting various places of interest including several Cathedrals from most of which the wonderful and valuable pictures have been removed to places of safety for fear of German invasion.

Somewhere in France,
Sept. 20, 1918.

Am so nervous this morning can scarcely write. My nervousness is not due to excitement but to the strain we have been under the last two weeks. We are just beginning to have real hardships and each day is just a little harder than the one before but we never give up.

I will if possible give you an idea of what we have done the last fortyeight hours. Don't know whether my little story will pass the censor but will run the risk. We were called about five thirty one morning and ate a hearty breakfast and were given two sandwiches, a can of salmon and a can of beans. About eleven we hiked, continuing for three hours and were loaded into trucks in which we rode until 3 A. M., just twelve hours and a half.. The trucks were loaded to their full capacity and we had no room to lie down.

I ate my first sandwich at noon and shared a can of salmon with two of my comrades for supper when I also ate my other sandwich.

When we arrive at our destination it was raining, not hard but just a slow but not very cold drizzle. We were all tired and found shelter under an open shed. Were just ready to make our beds when an order came to hike to another town. Most of us were already played out but not a single man failed to make the trip. We started out facing the rain, hoping it wouldn't be far to the next town. By the way we did not know how far we had to go when we started but when we were on the road no one would give up and we made the eight miles.

We would hike thirty or forty minutes and would then rest for some time. When time to rest came, off came our packs and down on the ground we would flop. The packs were heavy enough to work up a good sweat between rests and each time we stopped we would get chilly and start on once more. Not a man gave out till the last forty minutes and those arrived at the billets soon after the main party. I was completely played out and made the trip "on high" but have wondered just how much farther I could have gone. I'm sure it wouldn't have been much farther.

I didn't wait for breakfast but took a good drink of water and stripped off wet clothes and crawled under my blankets and slept about six hours. When I awoke it was about four o'clock. I dressed and started to hunt a place to wash as I had had no opportunity to wash for five days. I located a good spring and after filling up the inside, started to work on the outside. After several attempts I succeeded in getting fairly clean.

I next located a French Y. M. where I secured a cup of hot chicory coffee



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and a can of salmon. By this time our own supper was ready and talk about feed! Beans, potatoes, spaghetti, coffee and all we could eat and believe me! we sure made the eats disappear. I ate until I simply couldn't eat any more for I knew we would be on the move again. Sure enough we were loaded into trucks and carried to another town. We arrived about one A. M. and were told to sleep the best we could. Rush and I located an empty wagon and piled in. It was still raining but we pulled a wagon sheet over us and succeeded in getting a few winks before morning.

We arose about seven, washed, shaved and went to breakfast. Again ate all I could as I helped in the kitchen. Then came to the French Y. M. and here I am writing home.

The past two days have been hard ones but we have had it easy compared to some of the poor boys who have been in the trenches driving the Dutch back during this rainy season. It has rained almost constantly the last two weeks. For a week before we began our last hike we were camped in a woods and had no chance to get a bath or even wash. We could not stand it if it were not for our excellent physical condition.

Not a single man in our company ~~has~~ has been in the Hospital on account of sickness. A few have had mumps or some minor accident. We are well fed and clothed and our officers give us every opportunity to keep clean but in times like the last two weeks such things as a bath or a rest simply can't be had. I never felt so well physically in my life and after a night or even a few hours rest I am ready to go for twenty, thirty hours or as long as it is necessary. And every other American Soldier can do the same and that is why we are going to lick the Dutch and the sooner the better for then we will begin our long journey home.

Somewhere in France.
Oct. 4, 1918.

October and I have written no letters for two weeks but can honestly say I haven't had time to write. During this time have seen and been through some wonderful experiences. They say war is hell and I sure believe it and often wonder why we must have war. I sure hope this is the last I will have to go through.

Will tell you of a few things I saw and hope they will pass the censorship. The first day I had the pleasure of escorting German prisoners to the rear and we sure had our hands full. From the first prisoner I secured a knife which I am keeping as a souvenir. They were all good looking chaps but not many of middle age.

In the afternoon of the first day I saw my first real battle field which was covered with barbed wire and lines of trenches. The Ditch had destroyed several bridges which delayed traffic for a while.

The next two days I was on traffic duty behind the lines and I never saw so much traffic pass over one road in the same length of time before in my life.

Well the next day I experienced what war really is as I was detailed to a town just behind the lines and the shells were flying thick and fast. It sure gets your nerve to hear the sing of a shell and you can never tell when they are coming. It is simply a case of luck how close they hit to you and you will never know what happened if one should hit within a few feet of you. One is absolutely helpless and the only thing to do is to drop flat on the ground and then hit for a dugout if possible. How the Infantry live through it is more than I can tell and they are shelled much harder than they boys in the rear. But in the meantime the boys were giving it to the putch and it won't be long until they have to give in.

One of the most striking scenes I saw was of a German Battery. Evidently they had just pulled out upon the road when the shells hit for the four guns with four horses hitched to each were in line and headed for the main road. Every horse was killed and looked as tho they had been killed instantly there being no sign of a struggle. Four of the riders were killed and in one case the rider was still in the saddle and his feet in the stirrups. It was the most pitiful sight I had ever seen and I hope I never see one like it again. One American was returning with four prisoners when a shell lit killing the entire party.



Merle D. Parker, World War I soldier

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Corporal Merle D. Parker,
Military Police,
35th Division.

Here is a story that sounds a little fishy but is absolutely true. A Frenchman in 1914 buried some gold under his house so the Germans would not get it. The other day after we had recaptured the town his son came and found the gold buried beneath the ruins of his one time beautiful home. All the villages capture by the Germans are in absolute ruins and will require years to rebuild.

Now for a little pleasant news. I am feeling fine altho a mighty tired after our little campaign but will feel O. K. after another good nights rest.

Oct. 10, 1918.

No, we are not mounted but still carry mounted equipment but will probably never have more than fifteen or twenty horses. We have no use for them.

We had our barracks bags when we first came over and at that time I put my socks in my bag but fear I may never see them again. However we can get plenty of wool socks.

Oct. 26, 1918.

I most surely believe in the teachings ~~XX~~ of Jesus Christ and do not fear the possibility that I may be one of many to give my life for our sacred cause. I cannot hope for a more noble cause for which to die. We soldiers see death on all sides and how one can doubt the reality of the next World is more than I can understand. One of my old chums who was in the Infantry during the last drive told me recently that he could never forget his experiences. One of his statements was, "Merle, if I ever get back home there won't be a truer Christian than I will be." He realized how God had guided him through the battle and has thanked him in his prayers many times. I have heard many of the boys make similar remarks.

As for spiritual teaching, we have none except what we ourselves obtain thru reading the Bible and the few articles we find to read. Honestly we dont even know day it is and only a occasionally I know the date. Time is not measured by the day. There is only one end and that is the end of the war. When that will be no one knows and I don't even worry about it, just simply plug away day after day. We have no Sunday in the army. All days are alike. One Sunday we were giving the Germans all we had, on several Sundays we were hiking over the hills, ~~xxx~~ while on others we performed our regular duties. But we are well fed and well clothed for the winter and have no fear of exposure.

There are many everyday occurrences which are of no special interest to us but may interest you. One of the most interesting instruments of warfare is the Aero-plane. I remember when the first plane came to Wichita and how we all marveled at such a feat. Over here we see some real flying. I remember one time of seeing more than a hundred planes in the air at once and nearly all the time we see from one to a dozen flying peacefully over our heads. Early in the evening a German plane flies over. He is usually h very high in the air. Our Anti Aircraft guns open fire and we grow tired of watching the shells burst all around the plane. Occasionally one is hit and down he comes, sometimes in a mass of flames, sometimes dropping almost straight down turning over and over as he falls. Sometimes he is only disabled and makes a safe landing and is captured. It is very seldom we see two planes fighting as it is too dangerous to the attacking party. The only time I saw a battle between planes was when one French planes fought two German planes. All three fell in this case but we thought none of the occupants were hurt as they appeared to make a landing.



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Corporal Merle D. Parker,
Military Police,
35th Division.

Oct. 29, 1918.

Many of the boys in our Division are gettin furloughs and I sure hope I am lucky enough to get one. After being here for six months a seven day pass is granted to one of several camps made for that purpose. The time going and returning is not counted so one gets seven days of absolute rest and an excellent opportunity to get rid of our "Friends". By the way, we have at last found a method of keeping the rats away from our bed at night. We found a poor hungry cat to feed and she now lives with us so no more rats.

No more excitement with the exception of a few air battles. One plane was brought down yesterday. The other day a German plane dropped a lot of German propaganda. I have some carefully placed away in my pocket book and hope to show it to you some day.

Nov. 2, 1918.

Have sure been working the last two days. Really believe I have worked harder these two days than any other two days since I have been in the army. We were chased out of our billets and had to find a new home. Jerry has been more or less active with his artillery so we looked for a dugout but couldn't find a good one so undertook to rebuild one. At present I am sitting in said dugout with a nice warm fire. When we first started on the dugout it was a sight. We tore out the old bunks, floored the whole of it, then built some keen bunks and put up a stove. Were just ready to make it gas proof when a rumor came that we might move so are waiting until we are reasonably sure we are going to remain before putting any more work on the dugout. It is a good one and shells can't do us much damage in our present home.

We have been hearing lots of peace talk the last few days and most every day Dutch planes drop propaganda notes.

Nov. 11, 1918.

The eleventh hour, eleventh day, eleventh month. No doubt you felt as I did at the above mentioned time. It was an hour which we will never forget and already it has become fixed in my mind and I will never forget where I was at that time. We were in a small town with two hundred civilian population. This town had never been in German possession but near enough that the civilians had been ordered out and many of the homes were wrecked. In peace times the population was probably about two thousand.

I said before that there were two hundred civilians and these two hundred were certainly celebrating. At eleven o'clock the bells began to ring and flags appeared everywhere. School was dismissed and the kids went wild. At night Japanese lanterns were hung and the cafes sold their entire stock of beer and many bottles of champagne and wine. The kids had their fireworks and shouts and cheering rent the air. American soldiers walked up and down the streets cheering and laughing and singing. In fact it reminded me of an old time Hallowe'en in the States with a Fourth of July thrown in.

Nov. 15, 1918.

Peace! I did not know how much this world meant to the world until we are homeward bound and I thank God that I may be permitted to be among those to return to the good old U. S. A. We are waiting anxiously ~~xxxx~~ for some news as to what we are to do. Some say we may remain over here for some time and others say the first over the first home and if that is the case we should be among the first five hundred thousand Home.



Merle D. Parker, World War I soldier

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Corporal Merle D. Parker,
35th Military Police.

I find myself in another small village somewhat smaller than the one I described in my last letter. We are on detail and attached to a Battalion of Infantry for duty. The small town and only a few soldiers make an easy job for us. We have a good place to live and have a stove to keep us warm.

December 14, 1918.

Yesterday I walked five miles to a town and then back again just to kill some time and thru a drizzling rain too. Am sure getting tired of this life and hope we wont be here long.

Dale Gritser is now acting as top Sargeant as our "top kick" went to the Hospital. The company is at Commercy and I sure wish I was there as Commercy is a large town and I am sure I could find something to pass the time away. However if I can go to school after the first of the year it won't be so bad as I will be busy.

December 16, 1918.

My Christmas box arrived tonight and OH! such cake and candy! Am eating the candy piece by piece and every piece is better than the one before. The cake disappeared much quicker but the flavor lasts and it only makes me that much more homesick. The gloves are a perfect fit and I needed them badly as those the Government issued were not very good. I have not sampled the preserves but will in the morning. The handkerchief was sticky from the candy but can be easily washed. Hurray! for the chewing gum! As a whole the package was in fairly good shape and Oh! how good the things did taste. Too bad you couldn't send more. It seemed such a small sample of what will happen when we do get home once more. Excuse me while I eat another piece of candy. My! it was good.

Merle D. Parker, World War I soldier

427 J. Martinson St.

Wichita, Kansas.
January 16, 1919.

William E. Connely,
Topeka, Kansas,

Dear Sir :-

In accordance with your request published in the Wichita Eagle of December 25th I am sending you a short biography and extracts from letters of my brother, Corporal Merle D. Parker of the 35th Military Police Company.

Part of this may be of no value but was anxious to omit nothing that would be, so when in doubt have copied, deciding there would be less harm in sending some that would be of no value rather than to omit that which would.

Thanking you for the good work you are doing in preserving a history of our boys, of whom we are so proud,

Sincerely,

Mary L. Parker.