William Wendle Biggart, World War I soldier

Section 1, Pages 1 - 30

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 William Wendle Biggart, Company M, 137th Infantry, 35th Division.

Creator: Biggart, William Wendle

Date: 1917-1918

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William Wendle Biggart, World War I soldier

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Kansas City, Mo.

Dec. 18, 1918.

Wm E. Connelley, Secy.
Kansas Historical Society,
Topeka, Kans,

Dear Sir:-

In answer to your invitation printed in today's Star: I have numerous letters, pictures and photographs which might be of interest in your history of the 35th. I would not want to part with them permanently. However I would cheerfully loan them for perusal and such use as you could make of them. My brother, Wm W. Biggart has been with the 35th since the first. He began as a private in Co "C" on the Border, later becoming Supply Sergt. Com'l Mo - 137th Inf. was at Doniphan till in April, and went over in that month. Among his letters are several quite interesting. In the battle of the Argonne, he had command of his company for

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two days, and relates some stirring incidents. Soon after that battle he was sent with several others to La Valbonne to Officers training camp where he now is. I have no doubt he has received his commission before now.

Before the war he was with the H.D. Lee Merc. Co. in Salina.

He is a 32° Mason, unmarried and 30 years old.

Will be glad to furnish any of the above material on request, if I have your assurance of its sure return, or I will compile a "record" if you prefer.

Yours truly,

R. L. Biggart.

Cashier Duff-Repp Furn. Co.

December 20, 1918

Mr. R. L. Biggart,
Kansas City, Missouri,

Dear sir-

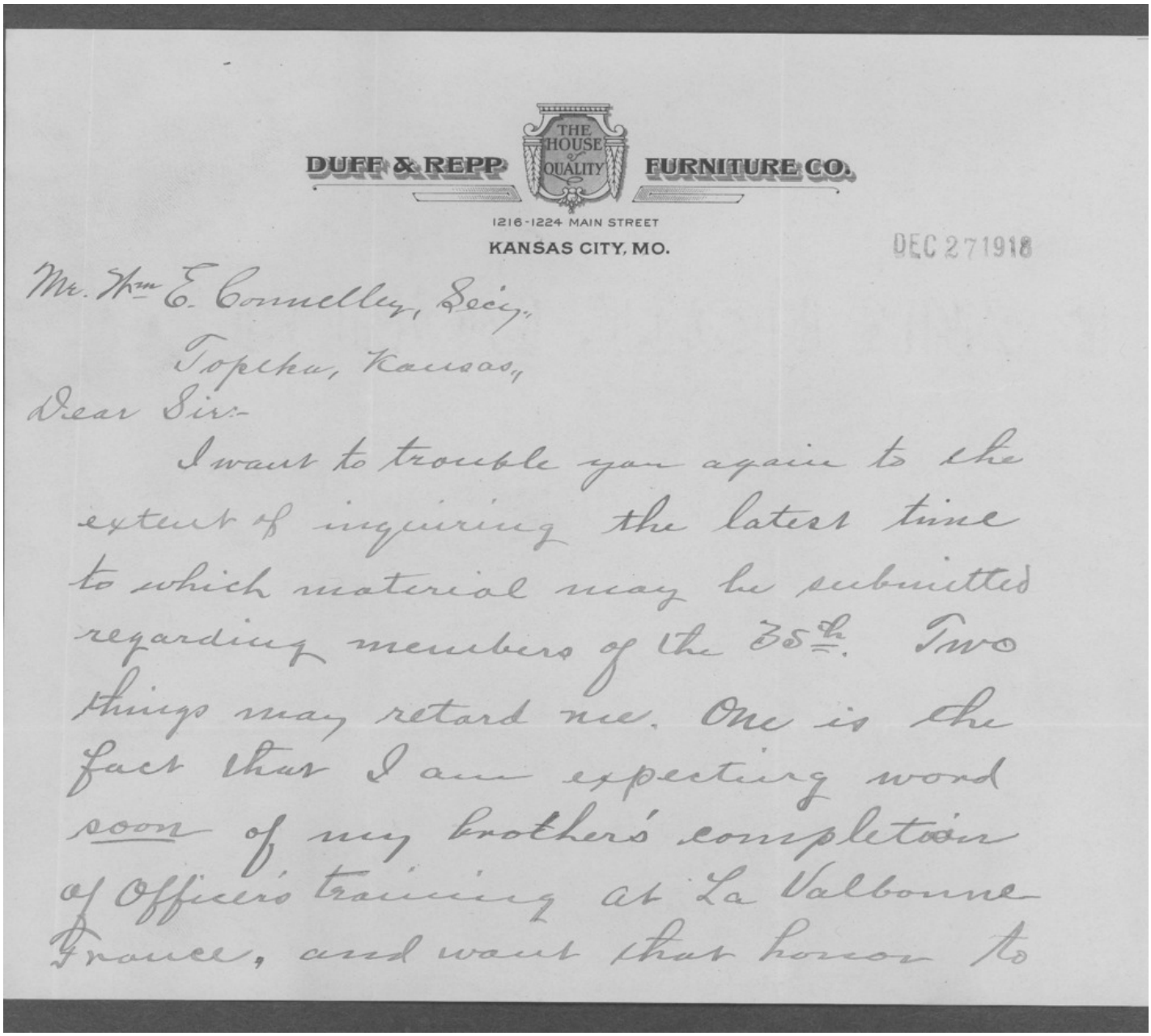
I thank you for your prompt response to my appeal printed in the Kansas City Star. I think it would be better for you to make extracts from his letters and send them to me. There would be no possibility then of their being lost to you. There would be no possibility of their being lost in any event for they would be in a fire proof building and carefully preserved, but most of the families desire to retain the letters of these soldiers. Please make me copies of those parts of all his letters referring to his service, the country, and his changing from place to place, everything except personal and family matters.

I should like a biographical sketch of the soldier, telling me when and where he was born, the names of his parents, what schools he attended, what trade or profession he followed, church and lodge relations if any, when he went into the army. The other information I can get from his letters. I desire very much to have a photograph of him.

Sincerely yours,

Secretary

William Wendle Biggart, World War I soldier



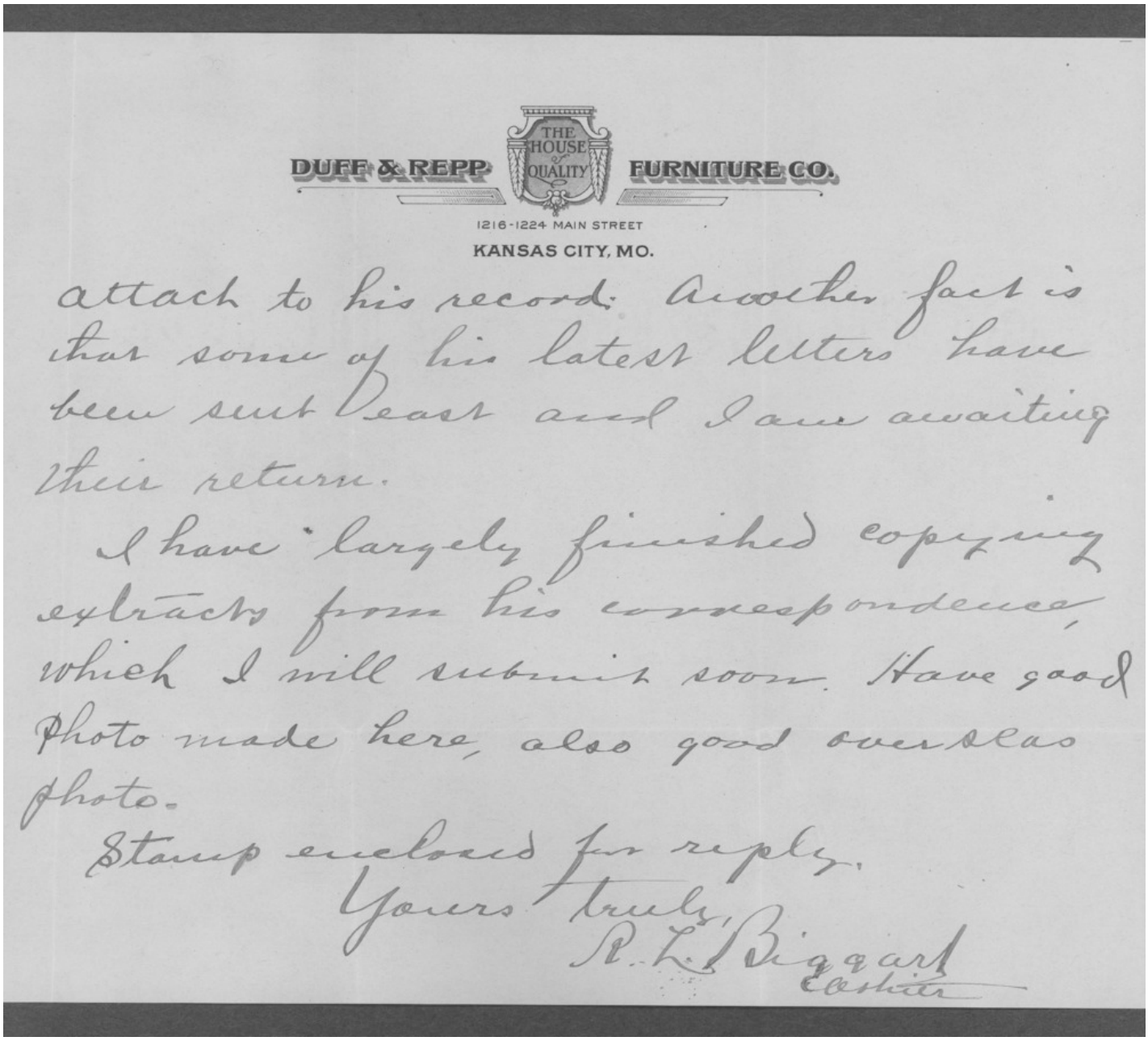
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THE HOUSE OF QUALITY
1216-1224 MAIN STREET
KANSAS CITY, MO.

DEC 27 1918

Mr. Wm E. Connelley, Secy,
Topeka, Kansas,

Dear Sir:-

I want to trouble you again to the extent of inquiring the latest time to which material may be submitted regarding members of the 35th. Two things may retard me. One is the fact that I am expecting word soon of my brother's completion of Officers training at La Valbonne France, and want that honor to



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attach to his record. Another fact is that some of his latest letters have been sent east and I am awaiting their return.

I have largely finished copying extracts from his correspondence, which I will submit soon. Have good photo made here, also good overseas photo.

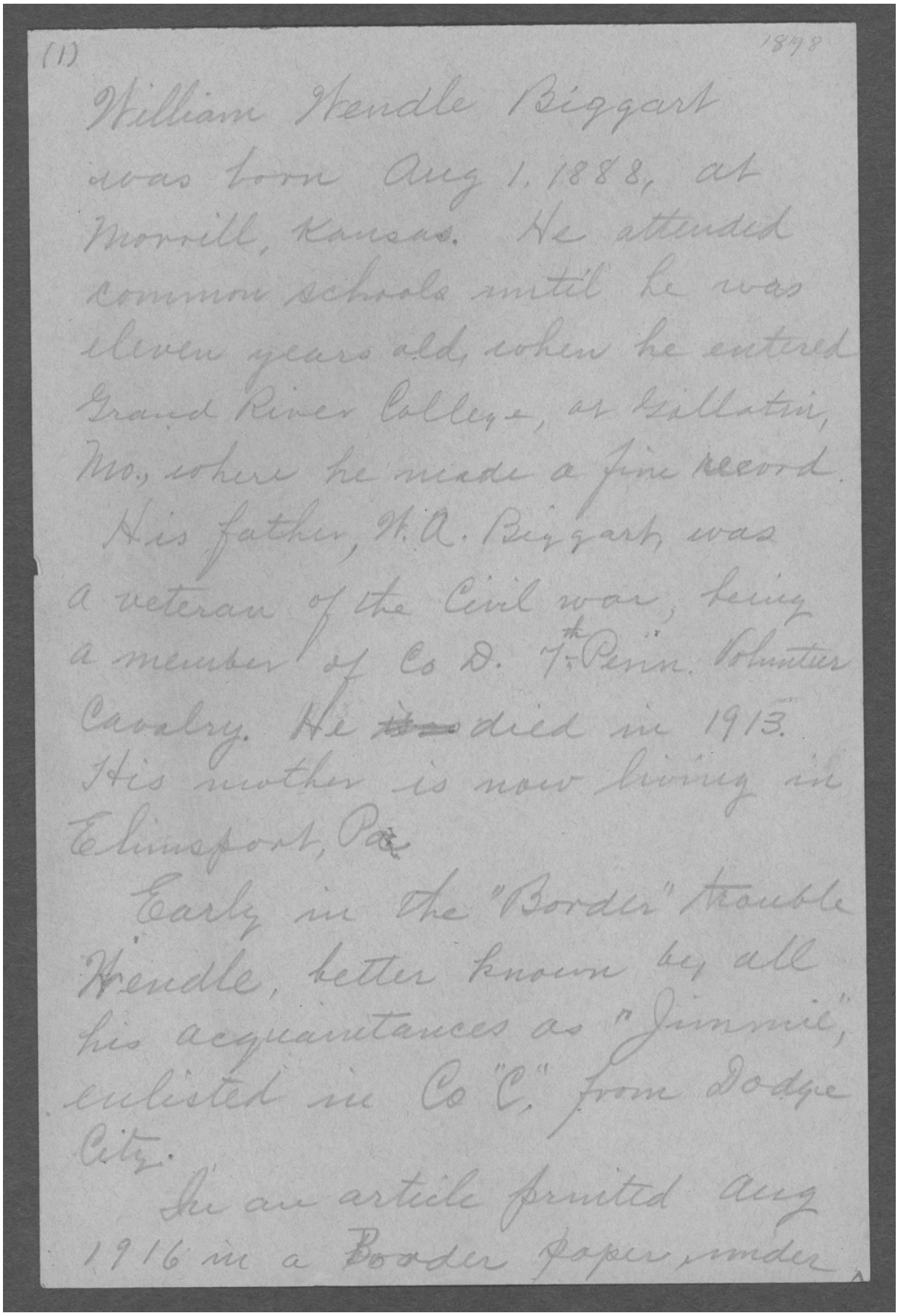
Stamp enclosed for reply.

Yours truly,

R. L. Biggart

Cashier

William Wendle Biggart, World War I soldier



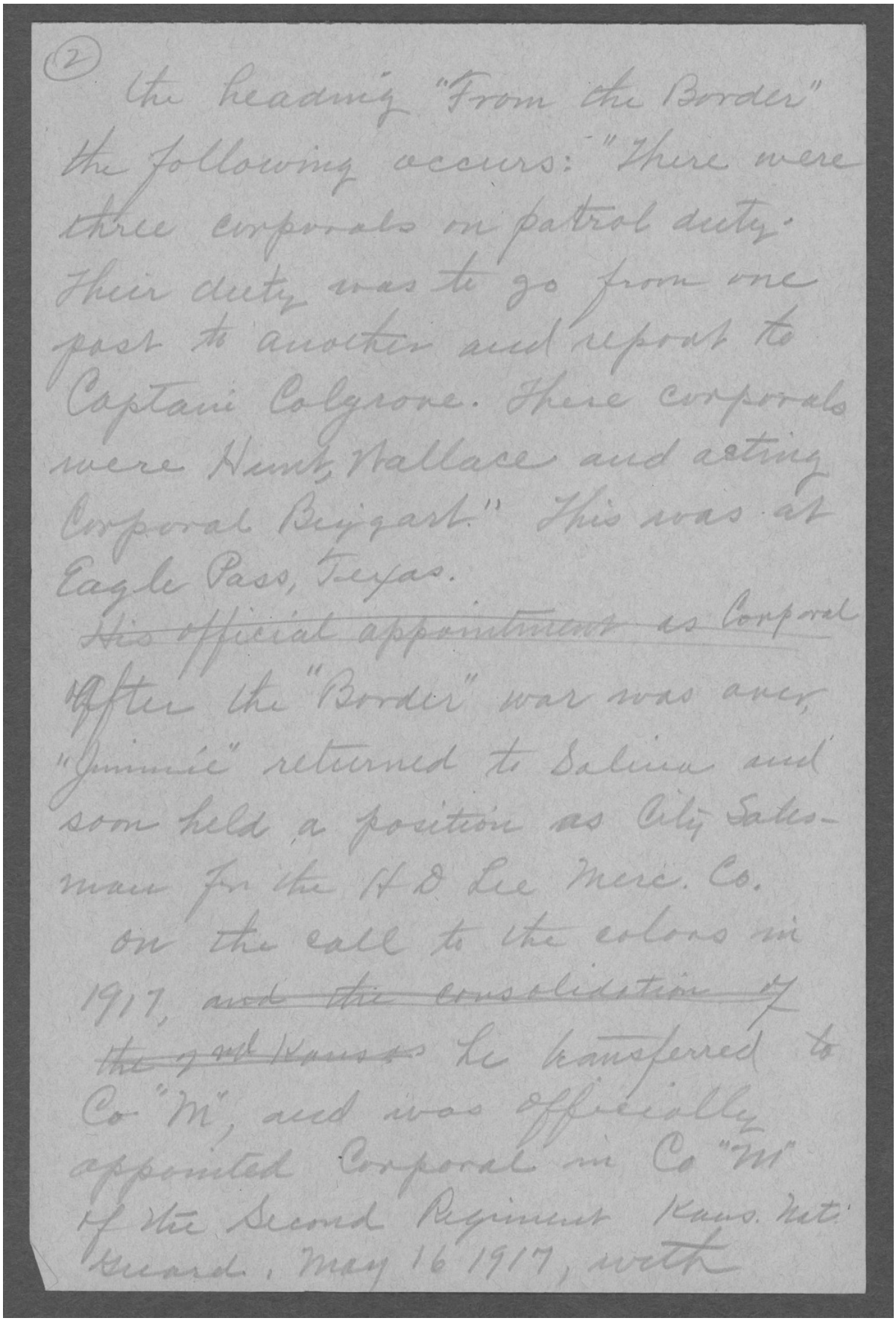
(1) 1878

William Wendle Biggart was born Aug 1, 1888, at Morrill, Kansas. He attended common schools until he was eleven years old, when he entered Grand River College, at Gallatin, Mo., where he made a fine record.

His father, W. A. Biggart, was a veteran of the Civil war, being a member of Co D. 7th Penn. Volunteer Cavalry. He ~~is~~ died in 1913. His mother is now living in Elimsport, Pa.

Early in the "Border" trouble Wendle, better known by all his acquaintances as "Jimmie", enlisted in Co "C" from Dodge City.

In an article printed Aug 1916 in a Border paper under



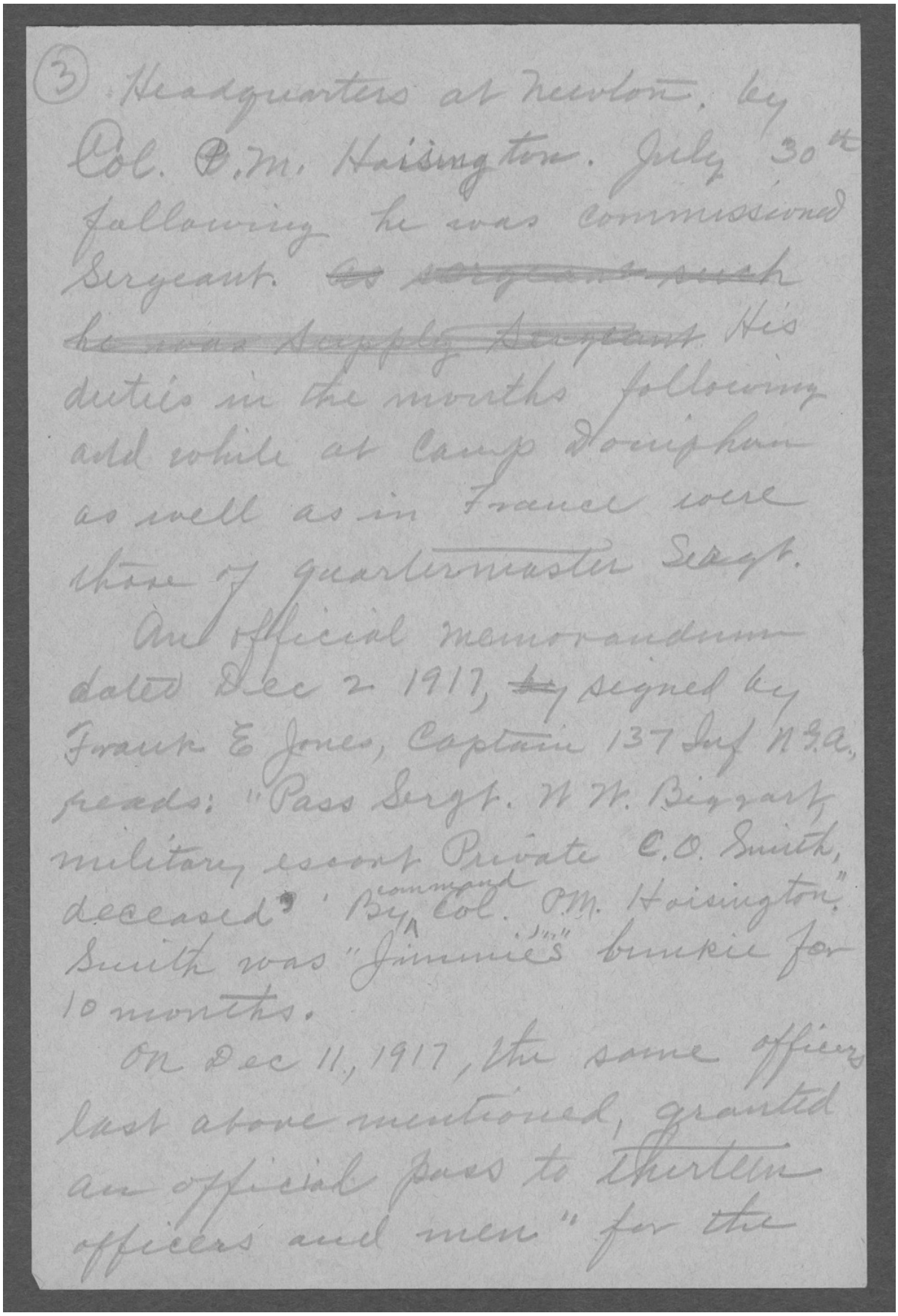
(2)

the heading "From the Border" the following occurs: "There were three corporals on patrol duty. Their duty was to go from one post to another and report to Captain Colgrove. These corporals were Hunt, Wallace and acting Corporal Biggart." This was at Eagle Pass, Texas.

~~His official appointment as Corporal~~

After the "Border" war was over, "Jimmie" returned to Salina and soon held a position as City Salesman for the H D Lee Merc. Co.

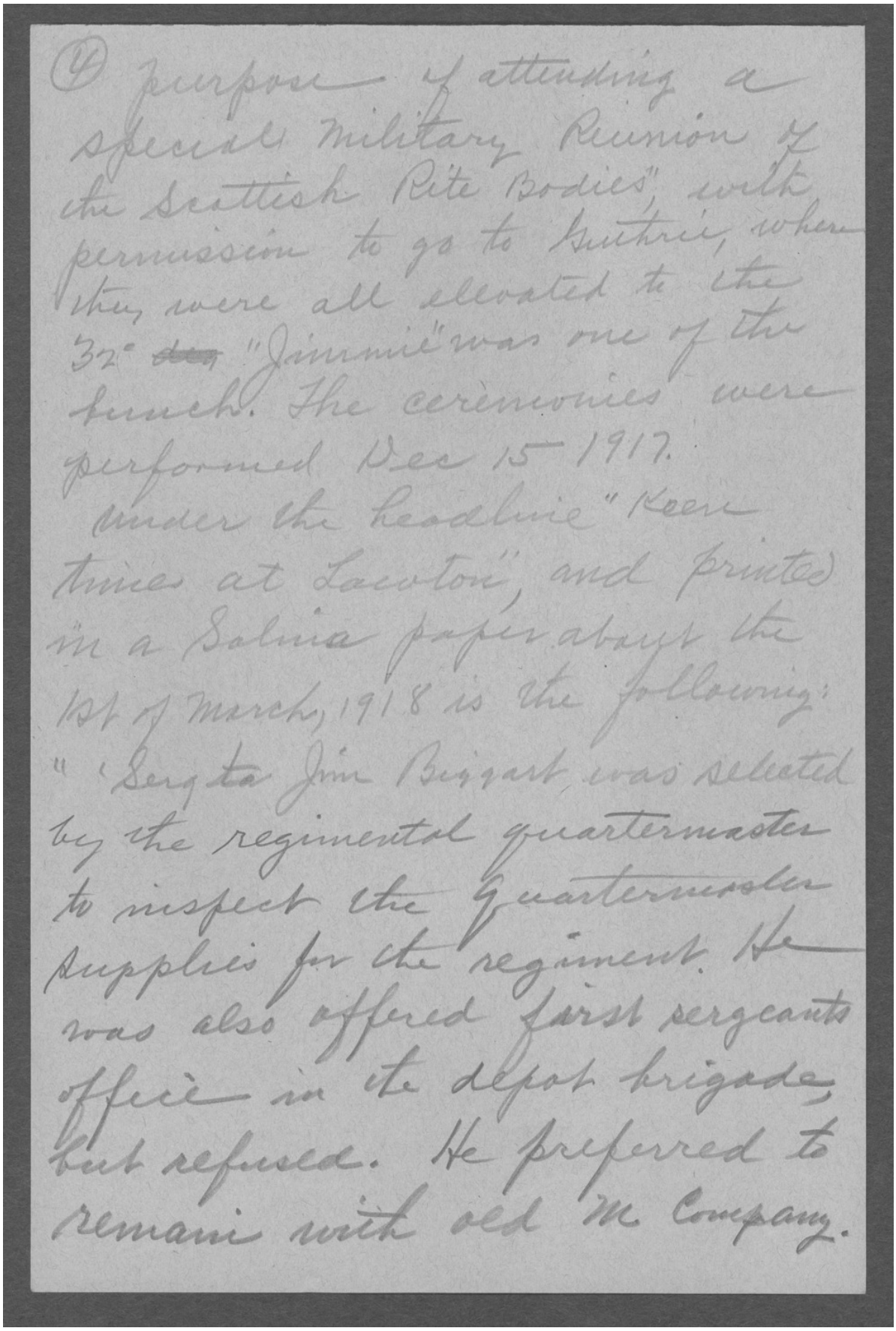
on the call to the colors in 1917, ~~and the consolidation of the 2nd Kans~~ he transferred to Co "M", and was officially appointed Corporal in Co "M" of the Second Regiment Kans. Nat. Guard. May 16 1917, with



(3) Headquarters at Newton, by Col. P.M. Haisington. July 30th following he was commissioned Sergeant. ~~As sergeant, such he was Supply Sergeant~~ His duties in the months following and while at Camp Doniphan as well as in France were those of quartermaster Sergt.

An official memorandum dated Dec 2 1917, ~~by~~ signed by Frank E Jones, Captain 137 Inf N.G., reads: "Pass Sergt. W.W. Biggart, military escort Private C.O. Smith, deceased." By command Col. P.M. Haisington." Smith was "Jimmie's" burden for 10 months.

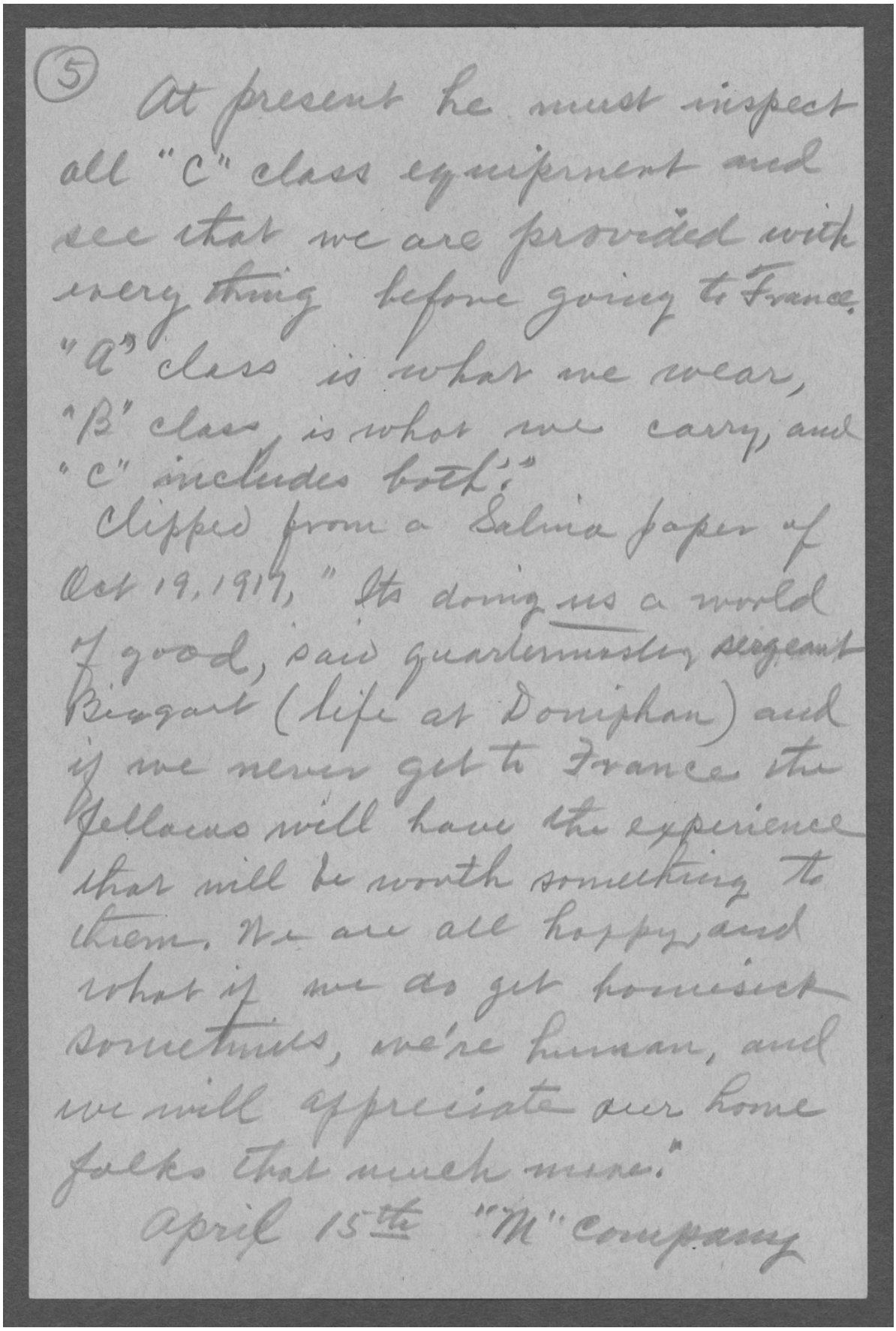
On Dec 11, 1917, the same officer last above mentioned, granted an official pass to thirteen officers and men" for the



(4) purpose of attending a Special Military Reunion of the Scottish Rite Bodies", with permission to go to Guthrie, where they were all elevated to the 32° ~~deg~~ "Jimmie" was one of the lunch. The ceremonies were performed Dec 15 1917.

Under the headline "Keen times at Lawton", and printed in a Salina paper about the 1st of March, 1918 is the following:

"Sergt Jim Biggart was selected by the regimental quartermaster to inspect the Quartermaster supplies for the regiment. He was also offered first sergeants office in the depot brigade, but refused. He preferred to remain with old M Company.



(5) At present he must inspect all "C" class equipment and see that we are provided with every thing before going to France. "A" class is what we wear, "B" class is what we carry, and "C" includes both."

Clipped from a Salina paper of Oct 19, 1917, "Its doing us a world of good, said quartermaster sergeant Biggart (life at Doniphan) and if we never get to France the fellows will have the experience that will be worth something to them. We are all happy, and what if we do get homesick sometimes, we're human, and we will appreciate our home folks that much more."

April 15th "M" company

(6) and others, passed thru K.C, on the way to France. April 18 at midnight they arrived in the west yards at New York, and the following day they arrived at Mineola N.Y. From the dust storms so prevalent at Doniphan, they had now come into heavy rains at Long Island.

Not much is yet known about the trip overseas, except that it was made on the "Baltic", and that, after experiencing at least one submarine attack, the boat finally landed at Liverpool. There the men paraded the city, and then proceeded to Southampton, from which they took boat to Havre. They then proceeded

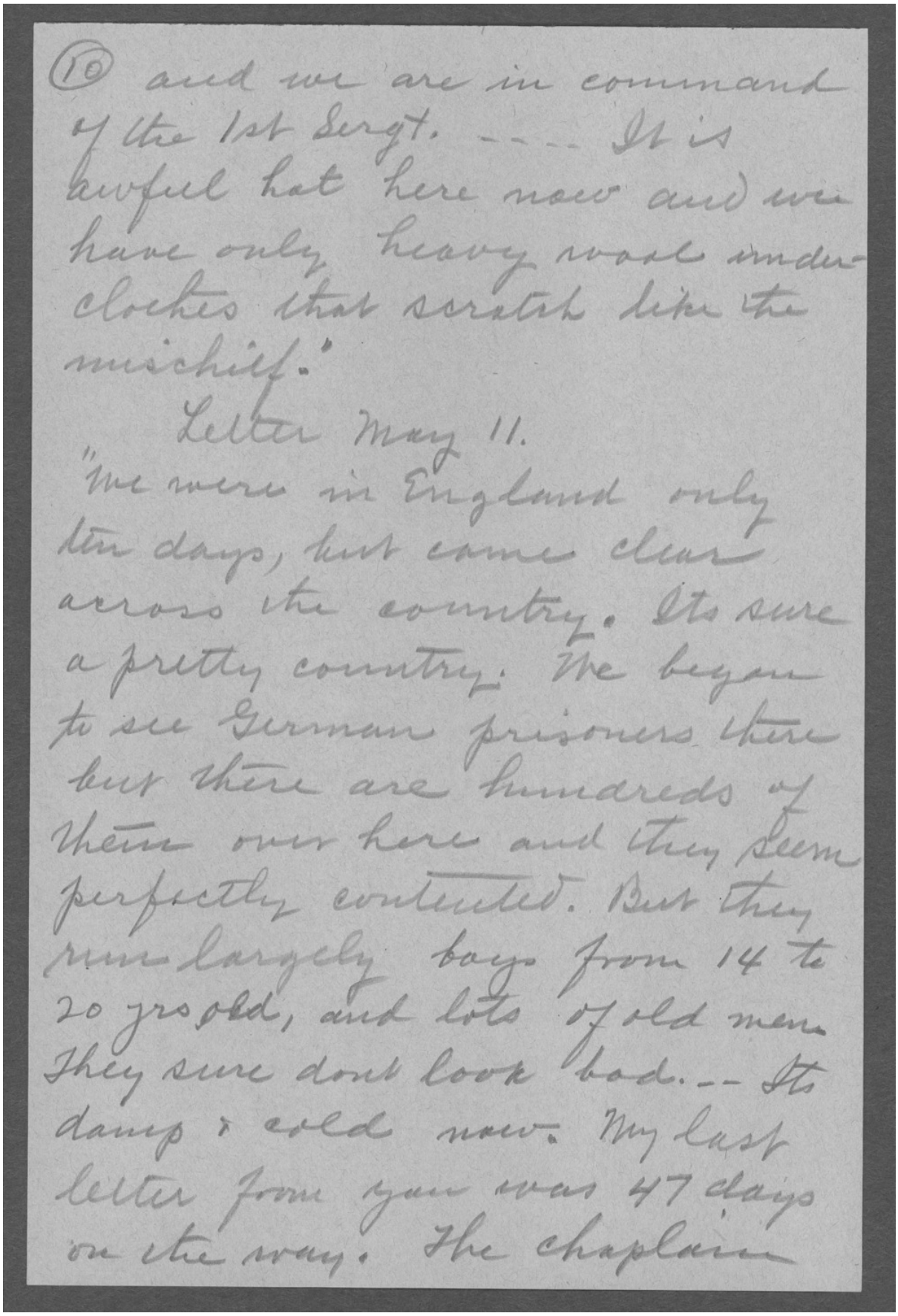
(7) up the coast to Eu, and finally reached Abbeyville, where they first experienced heavy gun fire from the Boche. Shortly afterward they marched south & west for three days and then entrained for the eastern France front, passing within four miles of Paris. A short stop was made at Epinal after which they went to Kruth in Alsace. During the summer they were stationed in Metzeral, Gerardmer, and before Munster. In September the 35th was ordered to the Verdun sector, and passed thru St Dié, Toul, and were in reserve at the St Mihiel drive. Some of the incidents now to be

(8) related occurred at Varennes, Cheppy, Charpentry and other nearby places.

Letter of May 1st.

"We are billeted in a rural French village. My own bed is on the ground in an old stable. I have two blankets at present and a shelter half, but when we leave here I intend throwing part of that away. For a pillow I used my shoes. Everything here is primitive in our estimation, wooden shoes, agriculture, etc. No stores, post office or bank. We are not on american rations and we sure can tell it. We were issued 30 cigarettes each Sat. but they are all gone now. The French dont seem to use as much wine as reputed

(9) altho they have plenty of it. It tastes more like vinegar than anything I can think of. Their main drink is cured cider. - - - - There are lots of allied soldiers around us in rest camps. Of these the Belgians are the best appearing in clothes, but they dont look like fighters. I have seen an aerial engagement but it is not permissible to tell where or when. Also it is permissible to say we were in a sub attack coming over & it was (deleted) My job here takes me into the line for about two hours a night, the balance of the time I am 8 to 10 miles in the rear. All of our officers are detached from the Company



(10) and we are in command of the 1st Sergt. ---- It is awful hot here now and we have only heavy wool underclothes that scratch like the mischief."

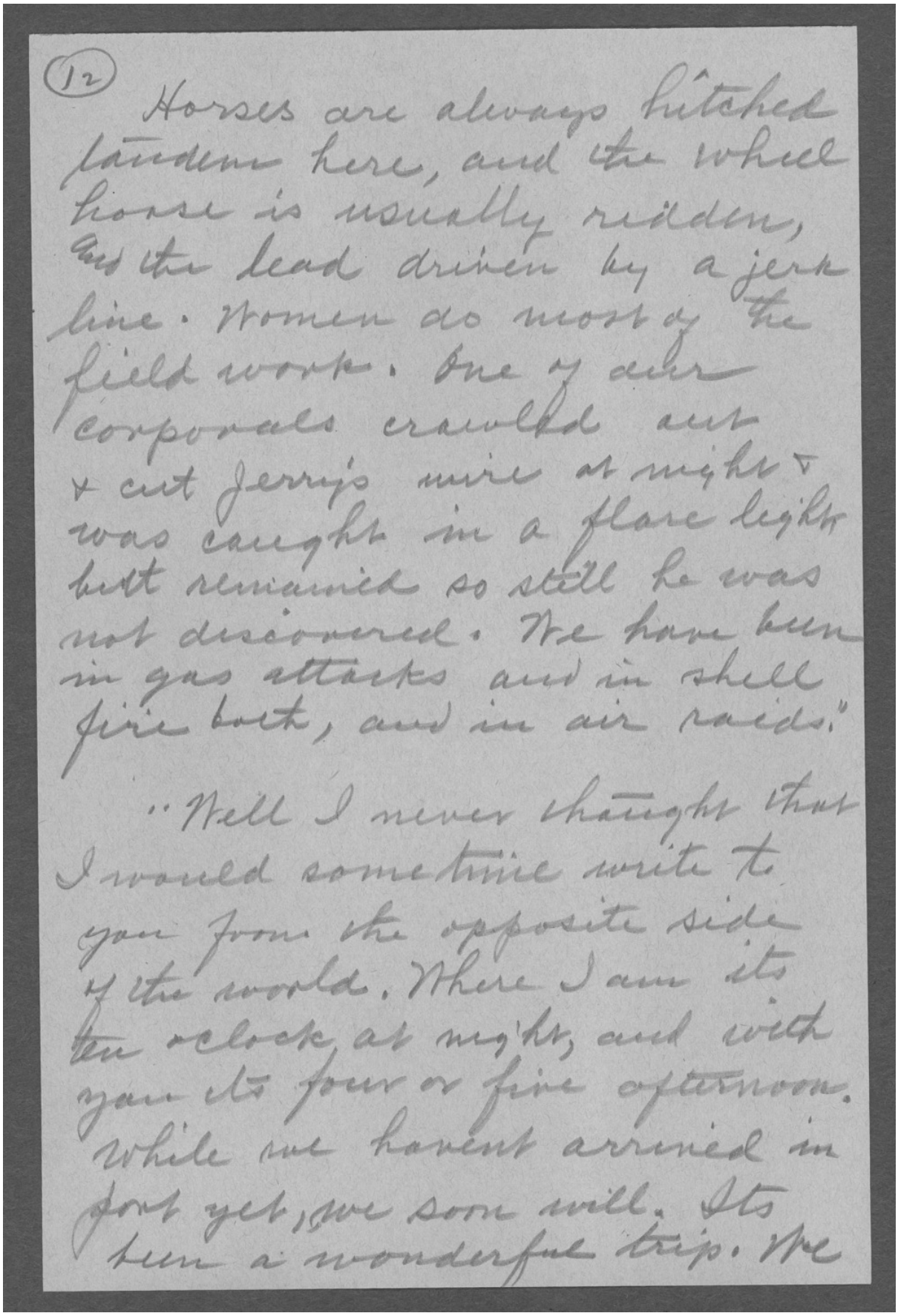
Letter May 11.

"We were in England only ten days, but came clear across the country. Its sure a pretty country. We began to see German prisoners there but there are hundreds of them over here and they seem perfectly contented. But they are largely boys from 14 to 20 yrs old, and lots of old men. They sure dont look bad.-- Its damp & cold now. My last letter from you was 47 days on the way. The chaplain

(11) held church up on the corner of the village street and while it was going on a big bunch of German prisoners were brought thru. They sure looked all in and glad to be captured.

June 15.

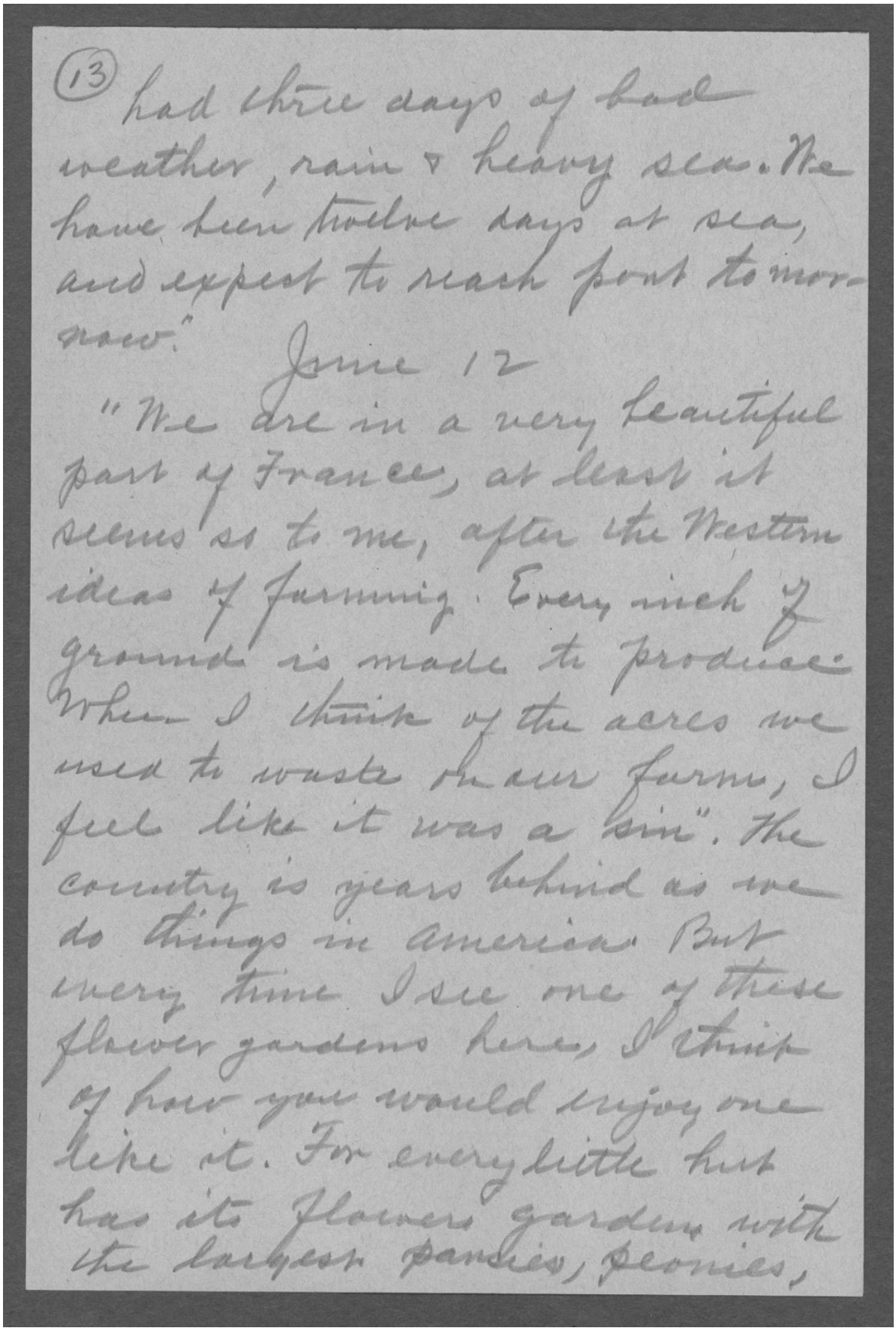
We two-bit sergts. have one large room about 20x40 ft in the main room on the main floor of an old stone barn. Our Battallion Supply quarters is in a building dated 1719, our Reg. Supply is in one dated 800. There's a church here begun in the year 1000 and finished in 1200 a.d. I've seen a team of oxen hitched to a new McCormick mower, and driven by a woman, who walks ahead of them and when she wants them to hurry up, strikes them over the head and the come a-snorting.



(12)

Horses are always hitched tandem here, and the wheel horse is usually ridden, & the lead driven by a jerk line. Women do most of the field work. One of our corporals crawled out & cut Jerry's wire at night & was caught in a flare light but remained so still he was not discovered. We have been in gas attacks and in shell fire both, and in air raids."

"Well I never thought that I would sometime write to you from the opposite side of the world. Where I am its ten o'clock at night, and with you its four or five afternoon. While we haven't arrived in port yet, we soon will. Its been a wonderful trip. We



(13) had three days of bad weather, rain & heavy sea. We have been twelve days at sea, and expect to reach port to morrow."

June 12

"We are in a very beautiful part of France, at least it seems so to me, after the Western ideas of farming. Every inch of ground is made to produce. When I think of the acres we used to waste on our farms, I feel like it was a sin". The country is years behind as we do things in America. But every time I see one of these flower gardens here, I think of how you would enjoy one like it. For every little hut has its flowers gardens with the largest pansies, peonies,

(14)

poppies, etc. We can buy lots of milk & eggs here & our issue of grub is good. We have three quarters of beef fresh for today, cheese, potatoes, white breads, butter and apricot jam & tea. We can hear the big guns to the north every once in awhile. On the move I have to take care of my transports, which consist of a rolling kitchen, water cart, and ammunition limbers".

July 3.

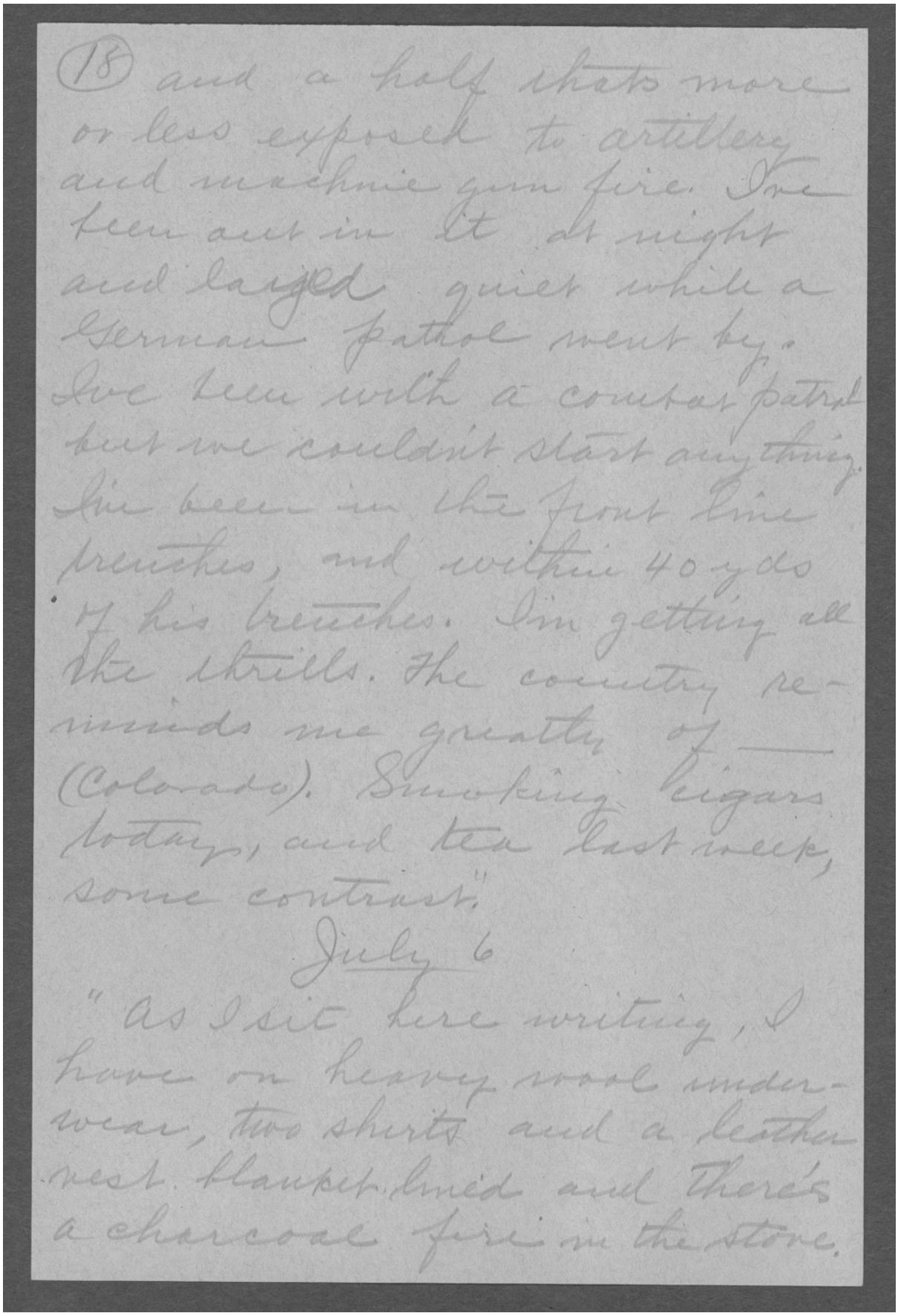
"Six of us live together in what would be a fair wood shed for an American farmer but to us its almost a palace. We are in a place that greatly resembles -- (mountains) All around us are trees

(15) and you know how they smell. Its chilly here in the day time, and evenings are cold. Ive sure travelled since I came over. Ive seen the blue hills of Scotland, the sun set by ~~Scotland~~, Ireland, the cobble stones of England, the alps of Switzerland, and the Eiffel tower of Paris. I seen many sections of France and have seen one big battle. I've been out in No Mans Land and have heard the whine of bullets and now am back in rest camp. We are about 12 miles from the front. My job requires that I travel at night and I start off on a road I never saw for a ten or twelve

(16) mile walk, when its so dark ~~I~~ can't see my hand before my face. Its just a bit nerve trying to be going along with my automatic, just about one half second off of going into action and to have about six big guns go off from a concealed position real close. And then - Ive had shells light so close that for a little bit I knew I was hit. You remember how the old buzz saw used to sound when we choked her down? Well thats the nearest description I can give to a shell travelling thru the air. Our btn. didnt lose a man while we were in the trenches, but had one

(17) killed the evening we came out. One of my old border pals in Co. "C" was killed yesterday, Sgt. Mc Fadden of Great Bend.

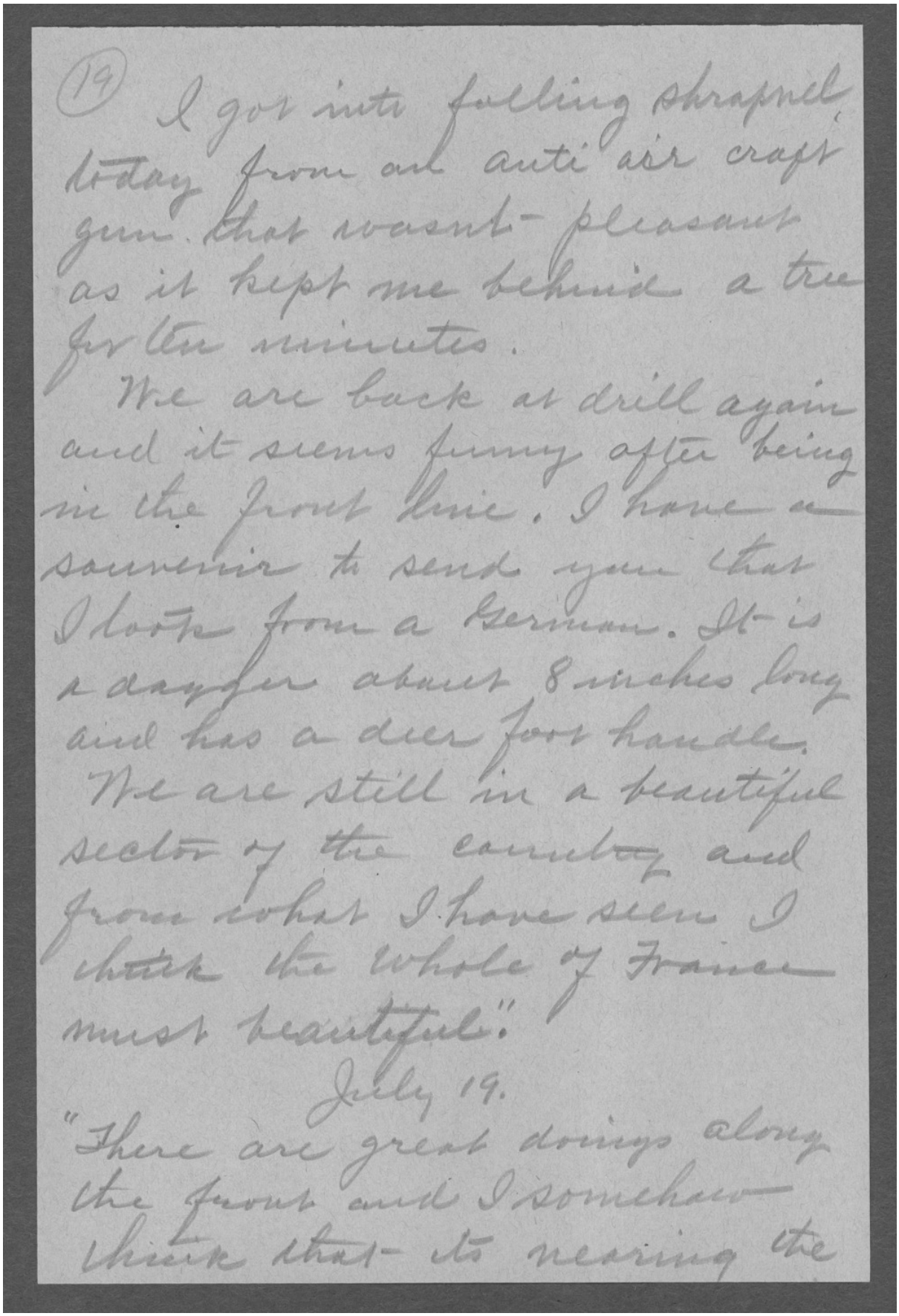
Well to continue, when I get over to the Supply Co., which may be anywhere from 3 to 8 miles away, I draw my next days supply of rations of clothing and ammunition, as I may require, load it on as many pack mules as is necessary, bring it to the company and then go to bed and sleep till such time as I get ready to get up. The packers take the mules back. At this point I have to bring them in at night as I have about a mile



(18) and a half shots more or less exposed to artillery and machine gun fire. I've been out in it at night and laid quiet while a German patrol went by. I've been with a combat patrol but we couldn't start anything. I've been in the front line trenches, and within 40 yds of his trenches. I'm getting all the thrills. The country reminds me greatly of ——— (Colorado). Smoking cigars today, and ten last week, some contrast."

July 6

"As I sit here writing, I have on heavy wool underwear, two shirts and a leather vest. Flannel lined and there's a charcoal fire in the stove.



(19) I got into falling shrapnel today from an anti air craft gun. That wasn't pleasant as it kept me behind a tree for ten minutes.

We are back at drill again and it seems funny after being in the front line. I have a souvenir to send you that I took from a German. It is a dagger about 8 inches long and has a deer foot handle.

We are still in a beautiful sector of the country and from what I have seen I think the whole of France must beautiful."

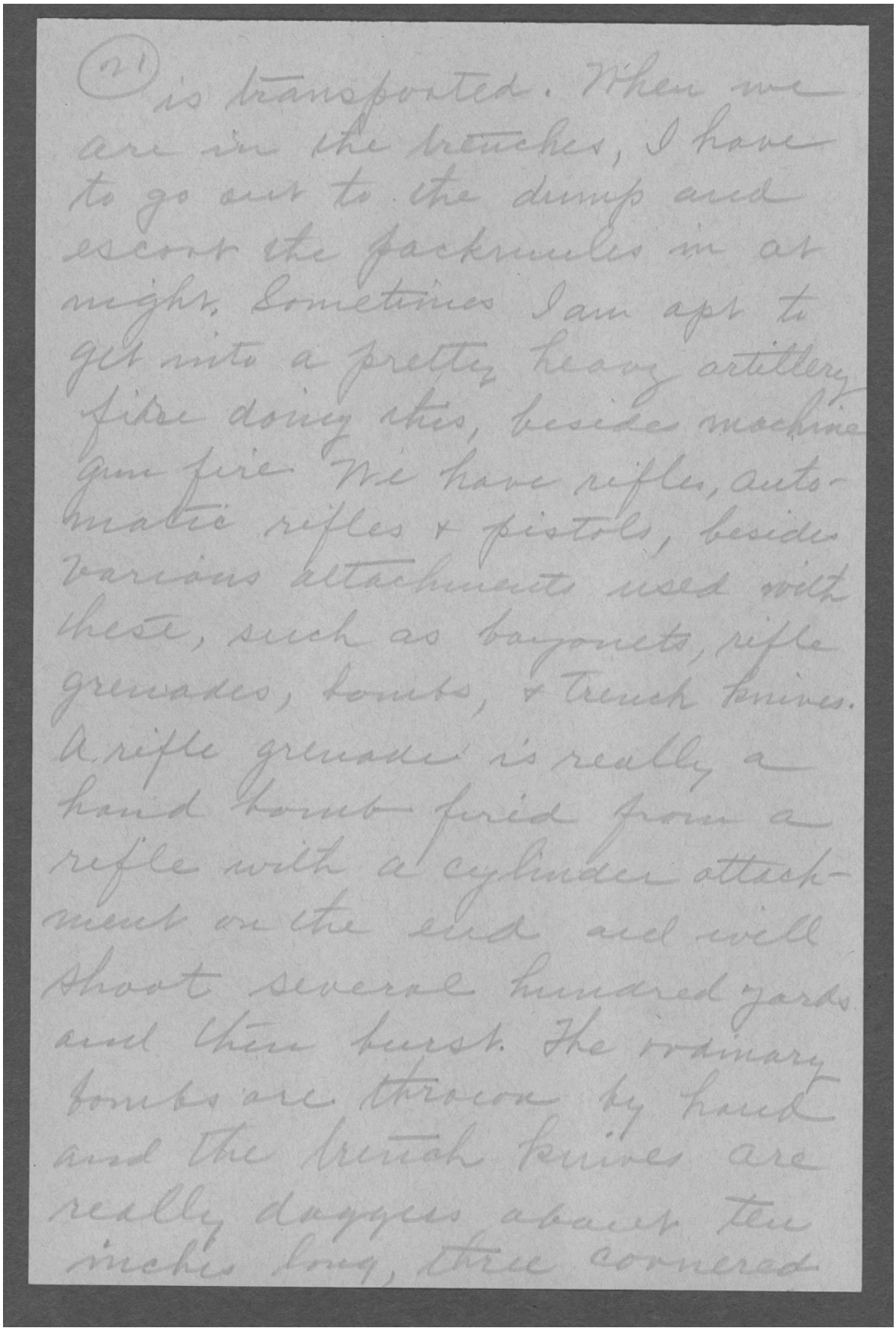
July 19.

"There are great doings along the front and I somehow think that - its nearing the

(20) end for we are beating the Hun at every encounter, and the odds are piling up on our side."

Aug 4.

This is Sunday morning and we are having a big misfection to see if the soldier are short of, or have lost any equipment. If they have and it was their fault, then it will be charged to them and taken out of their pay. That is part of my business. Then I have to make a requisition for the shortage, get the stuff and issue it to the men, and see that the charges are made. Then I see to the ammunition, that there is always enough on hand for them to shoot, and when we move, see that all property

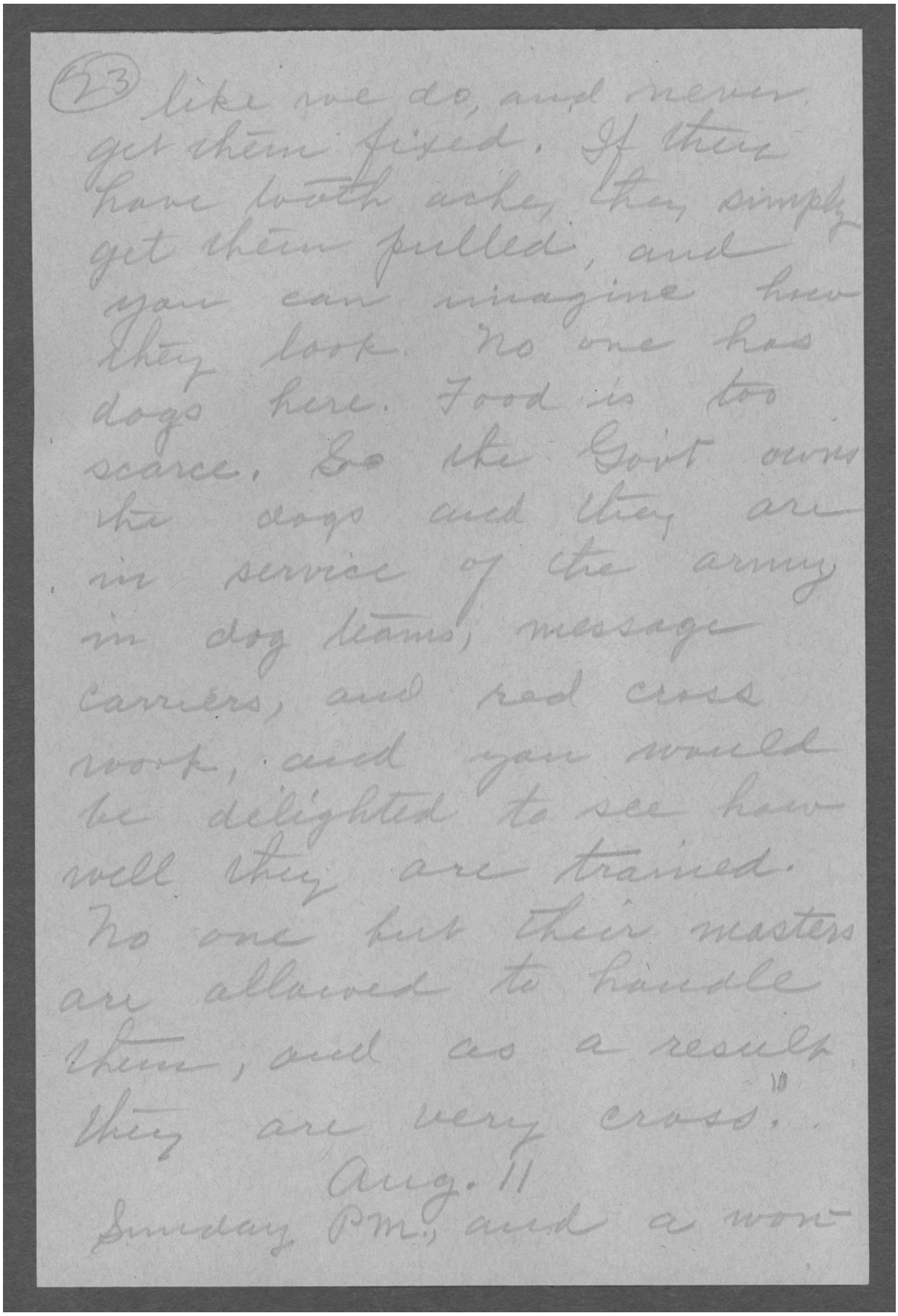


(21)

is transported. When we are in the trenches, I have to go out to the dump and escort the packmules in at nights. Sometimes I am apt to get into a pretty heavy artillery fire doing this, besides machine gun fire. We have rifles, automatic rifles & pistols, besides various attachments used with these, such as bayonets, rifle grenades, bombs, & trench knives. A rifle grenade is really a hand bomb fired from a rifle with a cylinder attachment on the end and will shoot several hundred yards and then burst. The ordinary bombs are thrown by hand and the trench knives are really daggers about ten inches long, three cornered

(22) in shape and the handle is a great deal like our old Civil War Sabre handle, except that they are plain, and the hand protector is studded with ugly brads made like knucks. These are especially used in close fighting, such as trench raids and in close quarters.

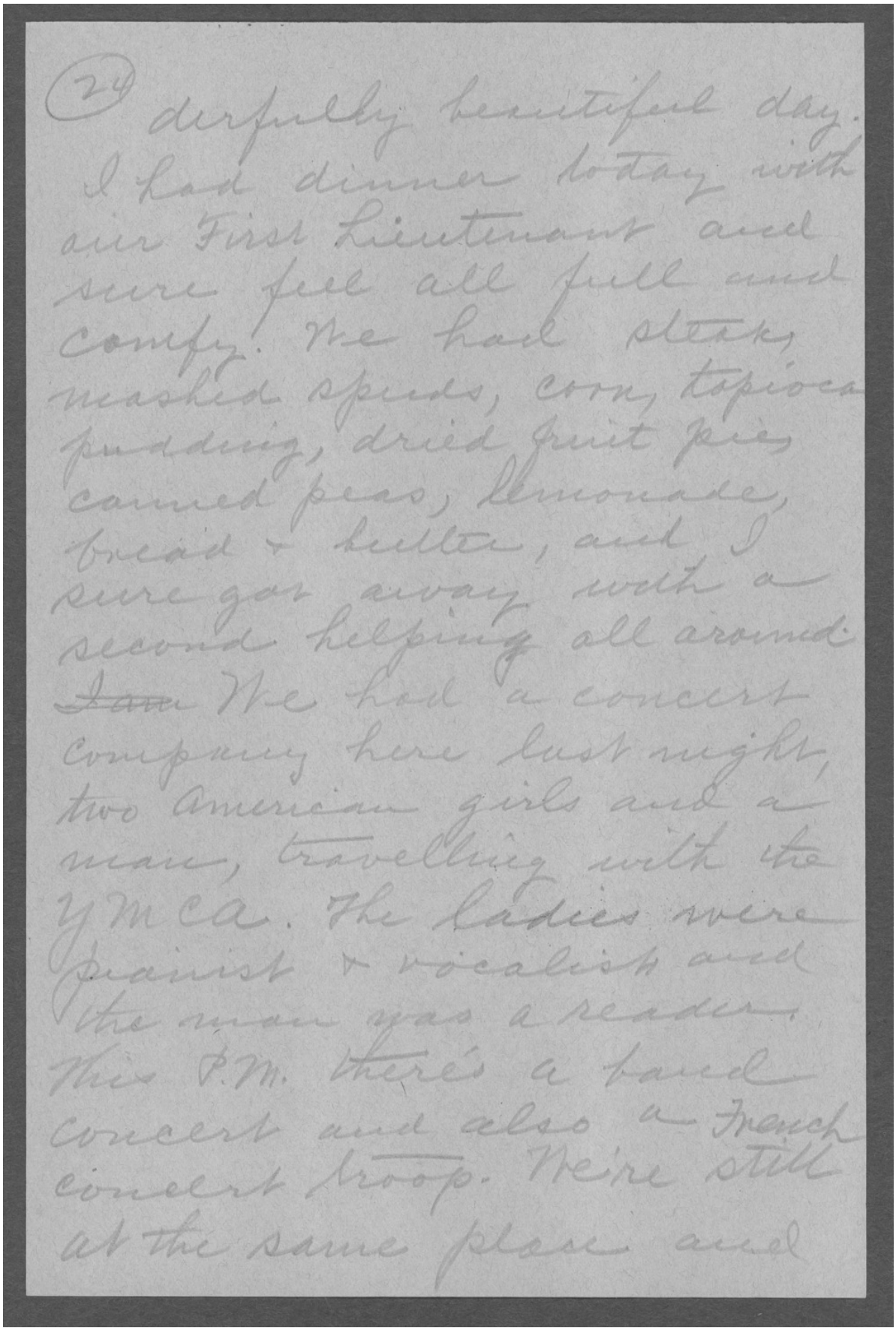
The bayo (native) here wear aprons over their clothing. I suppose the idea is to keep them clean, but at that they are usually pretty dirty. The little girls are usually pretty, but no one here ever washes their teeth, and, as every one drinks wine, by the time they are grown, their front teeth are usually rotted out. They don't have dentists



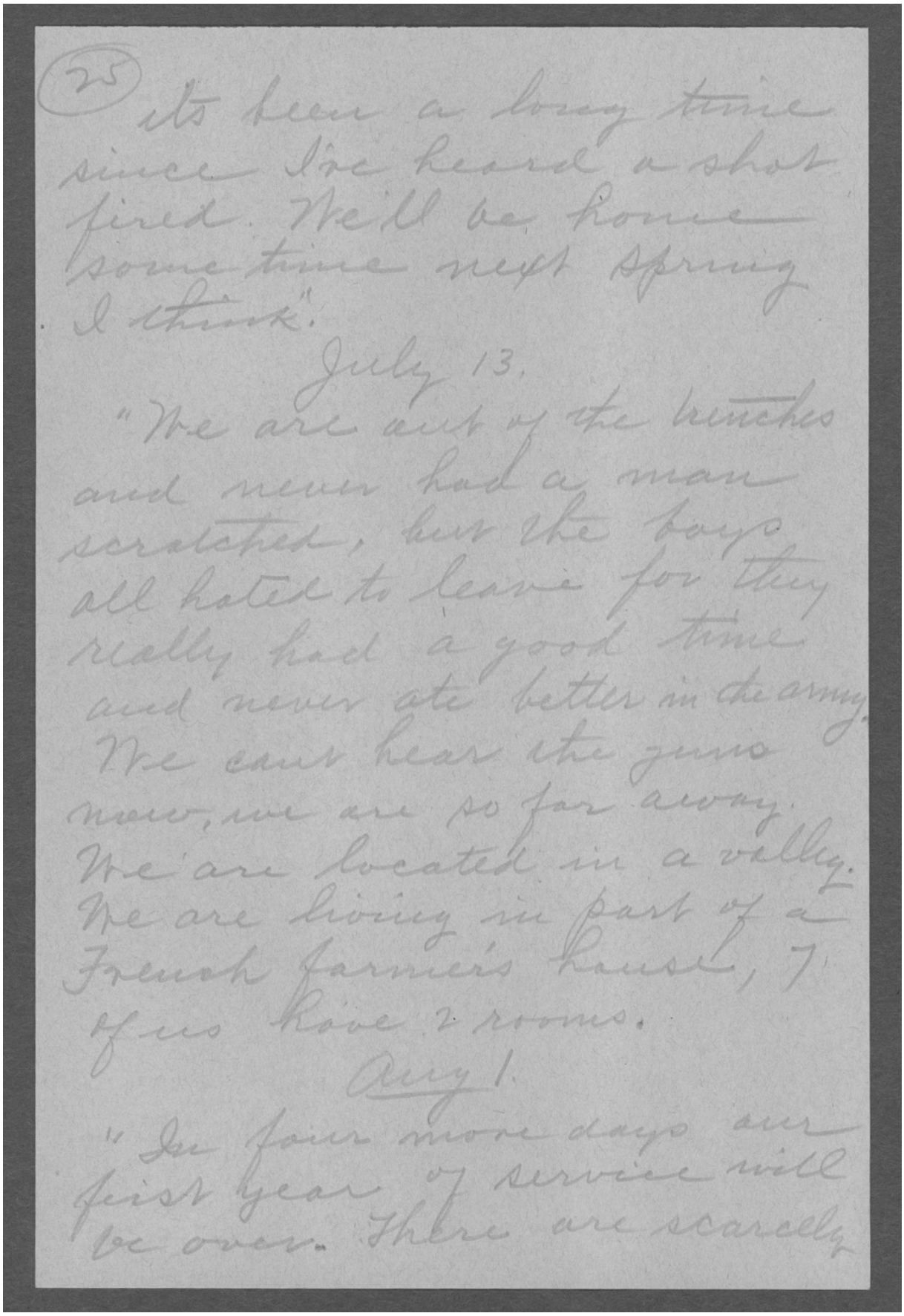
(23) like we do, and never get them fixed. If they have both aches, they simply get them pulled, and you can imagine how they look. No one has dogs here. Food is too scarce. So the Govt owns the dogs and they are in service of the army in dog teams, message carriers, and red cross work, and you would be delighted to see how well they are trained. No one but their masters are allowed to handle them, and as a result they are very cross.

Aug. 11

Sunday P.M., and a wonderful



(29) derfully beautiful day. I had dinner today with our First Lieutenant and sure fell all full and comfy. We had steak, mashed spuds, corn, tapioca pudding, dried fruit pie, canned peas, lemonade, bread + butter, and I sure got away with a second helping all around. ~~I am~~ We had a concert company here last night, two American girls and a man, travelling with the Y M C A. The ladies were pianist + vocalist and the man was a reader. This P.M. there's a band concert and also a French concert troop. We're still at the same place and



(25)

its been a long time since I've heard a shot fired. We'll be home some time next Spring I think".

July 13.

"We are out of the trenches and never had a man scratched, but the boys all hated to leave for they really had a good time and never ate better in the army. We can't hear the guns now, we are so far away. We are located in a valley. We are living in part of a French farmer's house, 7 of us have 2 rooms.

Aug 1.

"In four more days our first year of service will be over. There are scarcely