

Omaha Boy "Over There" Writes

Edward J. Phelps, jr., in letter to The Bee Relates Experiences in Thicket of Battle

Vividly of War As He Sees It

Edward J. Phelps, jr., son of Mr. and Mrs. Edward J. Phelps, 1030 South Thirty-second street, was a junior in Stanford university when he heard his country's call nearly a year ago. He joined the third ambulance unit sent out by the university to France. He arrived in France on July 4 and on September 7 enlisted in the United States Army Ambulance corps, previously having been attached to the French army.

He was in the thick of the successful attack on Fort de Malmaison in the Aisne sector on October 23 and visited this fort shortly before its evacuation by the Germans. On this occasion he worked from 36 to 48 hours without sleep and received his "baptism of shell fire."

Passed by Censor.

An unusually interesting letter has been received by The Bee from this young man. The letter, which was passed by the censor, follows:

So much has happened since leaving Omaha last June, it would be useless to attempt more than a brief resume of some of the past incidents that will pass with the censorship. The third Stanford unit, of which I was a member, sailed from New York on a French liner, June 25, and arrived in Bordeaux on our national holiday. The trip across was a smooth, uneventful nine days, with one exception. After all passengers had been given instruction as to what to do in the event of a submarine encounter, the afternoon of the eighth day a U-boat was sighted from the crow's nest. Our steamer started a zig-zag course, everybody was running up and down the deck, some with life-preservers already on, and our stern gun was turned to larboard, but before the gunners could fire, the submarine submerged and did not reappear.

Spend Sleepless Nights.

The boys on the steamer who had signed up in the American field service, marched in squad formation to the troop depot. We rode in third-class troop cars to Paris, arriving there about noon the next day, so we didn't see General Pershing's men march in Paris on the Fourth. After three sleepless nights, sleep was an appreciated necessity; and even though we slept on bunks for the first time, nothing less than a shout in my ear aroused me the following morning.

Our uniforms purchased and equipment obtained, we left for an ambulance training camp, which is located on part of the territory over which one of the important, early battles of the war was fought. Our unit learned we would have to stay there a month before another Ford section would be ready. Our unit conferred and decided to go as part of a gear-shift section, so we were back in Paris on France's national holiday, celebrated in memory of the fall of the Bastille.

Thousands of Cars.

Then we went to V— and took over a section of 20 Fiats built for five "couche" (stretchers cases), or eight "assis" (sitting cases). Thousands of motor cars were parked here and the city and grounds of historical interest were of rare beauty. Next day was spent journeying to a town which is in the strip of country the Germans quit last spring. Many hundreds of soldiers were enjoying "repos" and eagerly questioned those of us who possessed a speaking knowledge of French, "What is the United States doing?" Of course, we were kept busy indicating by signs and an occasional word of French, the preparations started in the states.

After a month of hospital evacuation work over an extensive area we were, to our joy, attached to the —, the division composed of zouaves and colonials, the best fighters in the French armies, in my mind. Every regiment is decorated with military honors and one regiment has received the townsgate of the Legion of Honor, the highest military honor bestowed on any regiment in the French armies.

Answer Emergency Calls.

Then we went eight kilometers behind the lines, where we were barracked. For the next month our section not only performed poste de secours duties, but were at the disposal of our monsieur directeur (medicine chief), answered emergency calls and on a day went to the ravitaillement to get supplies. I might tell you of some of my sensations the first day at poste. Since that time the same thing has happened hundreds of times, so that they are all commonplace.

To get to poste we left the small shell-torn village where we were barracked—no civilians lived there and drove along a grand route a short space before proceeding directly toward the east lines. We then passed over a tented base field hospital and soon came to Aisne. We crossed the bridge at five-minute intervals, as at that time this point was under observation of Germans in a "sausage" balloon. Then we entered V—, where our base poste was located. Three kilometers farther was A— poste, and only 400 meters from No Man's land, T— poste. However, a ridge of hills protected it from direct fire. The first day our car went to postes. I had the good fortune to go to the last mentioned poste. Here the French battery fire seemed to center overhead and I imagined the shells could be seen cutting through the air. Chills ran down my spinal column and the weather turned frigid. But when you hear a whistle growing in intensity—look out! The cave is a popular place at such times. It is hard to describe the sound, but imagine a tough piece of canvas being ripped, then a tall stack of "umber falling, and you will know the nerve-racking sound made by a boche shell.

Sees Horrible Sight.

Our first call was to carry two men wounded by some of the flying fragments of a shell. I saw three dead men in a room at this poste that were killed by the same shell. The torn brown of their uniforms was half replaced by red and two bodies were badly mangled. One's head had been blown off and his eyes were so ridged that they resembled a scarecrow more than a human being.

One morning the air was heavy and misty and when we reached our base poste we were warned about gas. We were on at A—, which is in a hollow between two hills. Here the odor

of gas pricked our nose and our eyes smarted—the same as from strong onions. The Germans had sent over "tear" gas shells. The French brandishers in the courtyard were not wearing their masks, so we thought the motto, "Do as the Frenchmen do," a good one. But they have had three years of such things and are somewhat immune to gas. I learned that morning that kind of gas makes your nose and eyes run and your eyes smart as though a hot iron had touched them. The hour I spent there before we carried any blesses to the hospital was the most miserable one of my life. The boches have a new gas that does not irritate its evil effects until several hours after being inhaled, then the unfortunate begins to undergo unbearable agony. Their bodies swell, they foam at the mouth and their breath is almost stopped—sometimes it unhelpfully is stopped. "Gassed" blesses have to be taken to a hospital as fast as possible.

Two Ambulances Hit.

Two of our ambulances were hit that morning. In one instance a 100 M. M. gas shell penetrated the top, passed through the normal positions of the drivers, tore away the steering wheel, cut through two spare tires and the exhaust. If it had been any other kind of a shell we would have been minus an ambulance of our section. The drivers were in the poste de secours at the moment.

After a month at postes we went back a short distance for two weeks while our division rested. Then back again to the same place as before. Things had been transformed in just two weeks. Roads, munition, depots, caves, etc., were skilfully camouflaged. I even saw some white horses camouflaged with brown paint. A few roads and tram tracks had grown into a labyrinth. Many large batteries had been placed and much more traffic passed over the roads.

Rumors of Attack.

Rumors of an attack did not come to a head, though, until two weeks later, when the French began a heavy artillery fire. I can feel safe to tell you, as both the French and American press has printed particulars of the big Aisne sector attack.

After six days of excellent artillery preparation, the men of the — division, to which we were then attached, with other divisions, went over the top at 5:15 the morning of October 23. The chief objective for our division was Fort de Malmaison and it was taken within eight minutes. The attack netted the French four kilometers on a 10-kilometer front, and the boches were pushed off the Laon plateau. Since then the boches were forced to evacuate the remaining portion of the Chemin des Dames and the French hold all of the vantage points in this aforesaid sector.

Built Boche Prison.

The boys of the section were all out at dawn and soon on the way to postes. I took about our hospital in the first part of this letter. Well, one day a boche aviator spotted the hospital and dropped a note of warning to evacuate. The French came back two-fold and built a boche prison pen on the same spot. It was a large one and surrounded by a high fence made from the same kind of barbed wire that is used in the entanglements.

A few hundred meters this side of the Aisne is an old chateau under the spreading branches of a grove of trees. Before its large iron gateway, at that early hour, several scores of slightly wounded were waiting to be carried to the hospital in convoys that had been pressed into service. On the road beyond, there were nothing but ambulances, and wounded who could make their way, some assisting less fortunate comrades. All traffic that could possibly be suspended was not seen that morning because of added dangers. We immediately went up to our receiving poste, as the cars were needed as fast as they could come. Five sections of ambulances were either taking blesses (wounded) from the two receiving postes we used, or two other postes to the right of us. The wounded are given first aid in the trenches or in the field, when possible or feasible, and temporary dressings and bandages are used at the receiving postes. Nothing permanent is attempted until the wounded man is delivered at the hospital.

See Many Prisoners.

We passed several small groups of boche prisoners under a guard consisting of cavalry and gendarmes. A general rule of the batteries placed at the side of the road is to cease firing when traffic is passing, but that day was an exception to the rule. In some instances the guns were pointed over the road at an angle of 45 degrees or more and were discharged over the tops of the ambulances. My ear drums had St. Vitus dance more than once, and just as we were rounding a bad turn, a "20" departed not more than 15 meters from the side of the road. The concussion left our ambulances without windows and the crash of breaking glass made me believe our car had been struck. But that was not the proper time to stop and investigate. Fresh shell holes were seen on both sides of the road. Six dead horses, cut from their traces, told the tale of one or more obus and two of the carcasses had been partly cremated by the burning pieces of an exploded ammunition car.

The courtyard at — poste was filled with blesses and we had a load of 10 wounded in a few minutes.

About noon I dropped off the car to get something to eat and George went on to the hospital. One of our cooks, Pierre, set up a camp stove to cook soup and keep a supply of hot coffee always on hand. While several of us were standing with a piece of bread and cheese in one hand and a cup of coffee in the other, a commotion made by several Frenchmen in the street brought us out there. Three or four hundred boche prisoners were coming down the street. They were halted before us and several officers among the number were taken to a quizzing station across the street. A loaf of army bread, a few bars of sweet chocolate and a package of cigarettes were eagerly sought, and when one of them spied a watering tank. A grand rush ensued. A boy of 18 years asked me to get him a drink and gave me the can, used to hold his gas mask. When I brought the water to him, he was so thankful, he gave me his helmet and gas mask.

Girls of Armour's Office Force Sisters to Boys in Khaki For Whom They Knit Cozy Sweaters and Comfort Kits



I accepted, for I knew he would have no further use for them. So you see, there was quite a little bit of sentiment in this incident.

Get Big Score.

I was surprised that the boches were not able to return the French artillery fire. The victory could not have been more thorough. On the return trip a small obus tipped the road 40 meters ahead, and two more about the same distance on the side of a hill. At least three kilometers farther back, when I thought we were safely out of danger, a sharpnel broke overhead, but none of the flying pieces struck the car. And to top it all, an enormous shell tore a big hole in the earth close to an ammunition depot. This scared most of us and we speeded up a little.

Just out of our base poste, we were halted by two gendarmes and told to make our gas masks ready for instant use, as a boche counter attack was expected at 9 o'clock. At 9:15 we were told to go to J— (a few hundred meters beyond), and we arrived there at 9 o'clock. Our men were five coaches and a boche boy wounded by a bullet through his foot. He rode in the driver's seat of the car, and in reply to questions he said he did not believe the boches would attempt a counter attack, as many of their men were sick from exposure and lack of food. They had had only bread and water for the last six days, for the French artillery rendered the boches' supply trains useless. A weak counter attack early the next morning was easily repulsed and all of the gained positions held.

Too Much Wine.

When we had returned from our hospital, the round trip being about 25 kilometers, it was after midnight and we dropped in to get some hot coffee. Pierre was in a deep slumber, with head and bare arms only a few inches from a hot stove. Plenty of red wine and cognac had done the work. He woke up and got our coffee.

Our section worked from 36 to 48 hours without sleep. During the first 24 hours we carried nearly 2,000 wounded, many of whom were Germans.

Two days after "over the top," I had the exceptional permission to go to Fort de Malmaison with two other fellows and two branderders as guides. Beyond the J— poste most of the young timber had been leveled to the ground like grass behind a lawnmower. The end of our climb brought us to within a kilometer of the fort. It appeared like a cheese box upon a raft of barren earth. The approach to the fort was like plowed ground, but the plowing was several feet deep. I stood in one shell crater, about 30 feet across, and could see nothing but the sky. Only barbed-wire, hand grenades, and trench bombs broke the monotony of No Man's land and what had been the German trenches. The oblong fort of solid masonry had been reduced to heaps of debris and a few blank walls, and the cave abris and the underground passageways were all that remained. A car gave me some German money, saw-edged bayonet and a German officer's belt, and, knowing that an offer of money would offend him, I took his picture—rather daring—but he thanked me after I had taken it. The fort is at the edge of the plateau and you can dimly see the towers of the church in Laon in the distance. I also obtained a pair of the famous Carl Zeiss binoculars, German insignia and buttons and other interesting souvenirs.

Made Careful Plans.

To see how everything was planned out in the attack—artillery preparation, bringing up supplies, barrage over the top, use of tanks and caterpillar tractors to advance the big guns, co-operation of the aviators in directing the artillery fire, and making the positions taken secure from counter attack—I would not have missed for anything; and to see the forts and No Man's land immediately after they were taken, was something I will remember to my last day.

Our section was commended by our division general and by the monsieur directeur and five men received the Croix du Guerre.

Here are some figures: Twelve thousand prisoners were taken from the German divisions, and two of the crack divisions of the Imperial Guard were represented in the toll. One regiment of the guard termed themselves "invincibles," and each man carried a metal plate with words inscribed to the effect they had successfully repulsed more than 20 French attacks and had inflicted heavy losses on the French. Those who were not annihilated of this "invincible" regiment, were taken prisoners. The colonel and his staff were among the prisoners, so rapid was the advance of the French troops. Two other colonels and their staffs were taken from the Prussian guard. Most of the prisoners would lose the war eventually and that there had been recent food shortages in Germany; that the civil population had suffered, with exceptions of the wealthy, the soldiers being cared for first. Half of the prisoners taken were boys younger than any of the men in our draft army, which proves that Germany has every man in the field she can possibly put there.

Scrutinize these pictures closely. Each one of the girls has volunteered to be a "sister" to some poor, lonely soldier or sailor who has ruthlessly thrust to one side all that is near and dear while he has valiantly gone to the front to fight under the "Starry Banner" for Uncle Sam.

The girls are clerks and stenographers in the general offices of Armour & Co. and are members of a society known as the Armour Soldiers' and Sailors' club. Every Friday from noon until 2 o'clock they congregate in the sewing room in the office building and do their "bit" for the benefit of the 1,500 Armour employees who have enlisted. At the time this picture was taken they were industriously engaged in knitting warm sweaters to be sent to the sailors and soldiers.

The little girl who is all by her lonesome in one picture is the youngest member of the club—also the proudest—and she takes great delight in emulating the work of her elder sisters-in-arms. She constantly plies her needles noiselessly and rapidly in an effort to finish her sweater in time. Her name is Zeta Tate and she is the daughter of Dr. and Mrs. H. T. Alvingham, 4521 South Twenty-second street.

Speaking for the club, Chairman Charlotte Lovely promises that each member will have a sweater ready to ship to the boys by Christmas, and in order to make good on the pledge they are compelled to take the knitting "utensils" home, where they can work evenings and during their spare time.

In addition to knitting cozy sweaters they have made a number of comfort kits, and as soon as they have finished with the sweaters they



will turn to and make comfort kits for the young men in the office and plant whom it is expected will be called into service during the next draft.

All the club members are justly proud of the fact that they have not sought outside financial aid. Through little schemes of their own origination the money is raised with which to purchase yarn and other materials.

Thursday evening at a sewing class the girls donate 25 cents each.

Going on the old theory that a stitch in time saves nine each moment of spare time is utilized. In an incredibly short length of time the article is finished and each girl feels that she has accomplished something worth while. The members do so many good things that it is impossible to enumerate them here.

The members of the club are as follows:

- Charlotte G. Lovely, chairman;
- Lily Ring, Edna Darr, Mary McGrath, Emma Ring, Hortense Eads, Mildred Griffith, Sarah McCormack, Grace Gorman, Marcy McLenathen, Kitty O'Grady, Helen Henck, Bazzelle Ervin, Marjorie Tripp, Jessie Ervin, Irene Ruben, Clara Boyle, Eileen McCay, Esther Kaplan, Marion Hanson, Clara Stargardt, Mary Moran, Elsie Koessig, Madeline O'Grady, Anna Petersen, Ethel Welsh, Frances Barta, Ruth Hudson, Helen Gilmore, Agnes Johnson, Margaret Lyons and Zeta Alvingham.

A number of the girls have been employed by the Armour company for a number of years, but according to Chairman Lovely there are no "old timers" among them.

A Human Centipede.

An Irish housekeeper was showing to some visitors the family portraits in the picture gallery.

"That officer there in uniform," she said, "was the great-grandfather of the present owner of the property. He was as brave as a lion, but one of the most unfortunate of men. He never fought a battle in which he did not have a leg or arm carried away."

Then she added, proudly: "He took part in 24 engagements."—London Tit-Bits.

HERE AND THERE IN REAL ESTATE WORLD.

Bits of Information From the Four Winds of Interest to the Developers of Cities.

The Real Estate board of Birmingham, Ala., one of the most enterprising cities of the country, with a board that keeps up with the reputation of the city, has worked out a self-renewing lease.

Lynchburg, Va., and a number of other cities are after the plumbing thieves, and the Real Estate board thinks that they have discovered the successful remedy. Most cities lay the responsibility upon the junk dealer, and the Lynchburg realtors insist that there is where the chief trouble lies.

The national convention of Real Estate boards will be held at St. Louis, June 17, 1918, and the St. Louis realtors have guaranteed a fund of \$25,000 for proper entertainment. Three thousand real estate men are expected.

Columbus, O., will put on at the state fair grounds, in January, a real estate and building show, in which all parts of the state will be interested. Plans for houses, houses themselves, plumbing, material, drainage, sanitation, landscape gardening, plotting, all will have their places in this interesting and unique show. The Real Estate board of that city is back of this movement.

Cleveland reports that 100 realtors or their employees have joined the real estate education class being conducted at the central Young Men's Christian association under the auspices of the Cleveland Real Estate board.

The Real Estate board of Oakland, Cal., has taken up the vigorous prosecution of the despoilers of vacant property. This is a new idea among real estate men. Cash rewards are offered for information leading to the arrest and conviction of anyone damaging the property under the care of the board, unimproved, as well as improved.

New York realtors state that financial institutions have shut down on making realty loans. They claim that this situation is not depressing, but has its bright side requiring the working out of some new system to offset the newly developed conditions. The rental demand is most healthy, and the real bulkwork of the professional business of the day. In a word the real estate conditions show that it is a buyer's market and the time to buy is now.

Philadelphia announces that it is facing one of the most acute shortages in dwellings for rent in its history.

Youngstown, O., is still behind in the demand for buildings on account of the increase in population, due to industrial conditions.

Buffalo, N. Y., is a paradox. Rents are higher, building materials have doubled in price, labor costs 35 per cent more. Yet you can buy many houses in Buffalo at prices not greater than two years ago.

Pittsburgh is influenced by the great demand of manufacturing concerns and plant extensions. The Jones & Laughlin Co., has during the last six months acquired title to \$500,000 worth of lands. This company has also been building a town, Woodlawn, erecting hundreds of modern dwellings.

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