



UNTOLD TALES OF FALMOUTH

from the archives of Museums on the Green

From Heaven to Hell via Hoboken, part 2

The trip to the south took three days. We left Camp Devens in zero weather, in fact the thermometer reading was 26 below. We arrived in Camp Greene [NC] with the mercury up to 77. The boys immediately named it Camp Mud, and mud it was. The camp was on a site of red clay, and with very little drainage, so that when it rained, it was mud to a fellow's knees. Everything seemed filthy, compared with Camp Devens. I was assigned to Co. I, 61st Infantry.

Saw MacKilligan, Alex. Jones, and Emerson Handy at Greene. Also saw Bill Wood, who was killed shortly afterwards at Chateau Thierry. I saw him the day before he left for overseas, so was probably the last of the Falmouth boys he saw on this side.

We used to go to Charlotte occasionally, to attend shows, dances, and church. It was a good enough city, but did not give us the good times we had enjoyed at Devens. We made a twelve mile hike with full equipment, to the rifle range where we stayed for three days. My average was only fair, as I was not much of a shot.

We broke camp for an embarkation point, which proved to be Camp Merritt, N.J. Here we had one steady round of inspections. On April 16th we left the Camp by train for Hoboken. We traveled with all the curtains down, so that no one could see that soldiers were being transported, and then they double timed us through the East end of Hoboken, where



Top: Poster, now on display in the Cultural Center.

Bottom: William Wood of Falmouth died in France on July 30, 1918, aged 24 years, of wounds received at Chateau Thierry.

the largest number of German sympathizers in the world were located. This goes to show the sense in some of the Army orders.

We were assigned to HMS *Czaritza*, which before being taken into the English service was a cattle boat, between Australia and France, and I think that our outfit was the first load of humans it had ever carried. We were packed in, about the same as sardines.

We sailed on the morning of the 17th, with everyone below, until we were out of New York harbor. We were accompanied by a convoy of eleven other transports and the Cruiser *Salem*. It was a tiresome trip, with absolutely nothing to do. If it hadn't been for a collection of books on board, I think some of the boys would have gone nutty.

We struck the submarine zone on the 27th and on Sunday morning at 12:15 the sub warning sounded, and we were ordered to stand by the life boats. The destroyers dropped five depth bombs alongside our ship and several rifle shots were fired. Half the fellows were scared stiff, and the other half were so stiff with the cold that they couldn't get scared.

We pulled into Brest harbor at about nine o'clock. After a three mile hike, most all of it up hill, we reached an old French army camp. This was where we were first introduced to the cootie, as the place was alive with them. We stayed three days and started for the training area.

Saw possibly five hundred German prisoners at Orleans. We talked with them for a few minutes and found that they were glad they had been taken prisoners, rather than to have continued on the lines.

We arrived on May 4th at Le Puit at about 10:30 p.m. On May 15th, I went to Bligny for work with the drum and fife corps. This soft snap lasted for ten days. Returned to the company in time to draw gas masks, and then the fun began in earnest. We would drill for a solid two hours with the masks on and nearly choke.



Top: One of the ways civilians could support the troops was by supplying them with books.

Bottom: Canister belonging to Franz Schmidt contains a German gas mask.

The poster and canister are both currently on display in the Hallett Barn and Cultural Center as part of our exhibit, "The Doughboys Go to War."

Perhaps we didn't curse the guy who invented them. But it was for our own good as I was soon to know.

Decoration Day was our first holiday and being so soon after pay day, we made it a day of celebration and not a few of the boys proceeded to tank up. We went over to Vendrevre, a nearby city, for the day and evening, and before morning we had to form a police outfit, and bring about half of the outfit back.

On June 1st, the first phase of our training over, we pulled out of Le Puit and hiked all afternoon and evening to St. Brenne, some thirty kilometers. I lay down in the street for a rest. We were loaded on box cars the next evening. We climbed all night and by morning had reached a fairly high altitude in the Vosges mountains. At Gerardmer we unloaded and hiked a short distance to Xonrupt. I was billeted in a farm house and drew a real bed in place of the usual pile of hay. During the next week, we did squad drill, skirmishing, grenade throwing etc. It was all pretty strenuous work.

We left Xonrupt on June 12th and did an all night hike to Le Vic. On June 13th we arrived at Le Croix sur Mines, an old mountain town, which had stood up in spite of the four years of bombardments. There were still some civilians living there.

On the 14th of June, we started on a hike to the trenches.

*J. Robert Kershaw
(1894-1959)*

To be continued . . .

Learn more:

Visit our exhibit "The Doughboys Go to War"

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Top: Citizens were asked to send their binoculars to Franklin D. Roosevelt at the Navy Department, so that men on destroyers could better spot U-boats.

Bottom: U-boat UB 14 in the Baltic Sea, 1918. Photo in public domain.