



# UNTOLD TALES OF FALMOUTH

from the archives of Museums on the Green

## From Heaven to Hell via Hoboken

My first thought of entering the Army came on June 5<sup>th</sup> 1917, when I with all other men between the ages of 21 and 31 had to appear before the registration board. I registered at about seven in the morning and forgot all about it until the middle of August, when I was called to Barnstable for a physical examination, which I passed. My next thought was brought to me, in the shape of a small card, advising me to get ready to leave for camp, and on Sept. 16<sup>th</sup> I received a card to report to Hyannis for duty.

The boys from Falmouth and surrounding villages reported at the town hall on the afternoon of Sept. 19<sup>th</sup>. We were given several short talks by men in the town, marched around the town and then after all farewells were finished we were taken to Hyannis by auto. Here we attended a patriotic gathering in the Masonic Hall, where we listened to more speeches. I did not know that we had so many friends in the world and from the talks we heard, one would think that we were all models. Early the next morning we were loaded on a special train and by 8:30 we were on our way to Devens. . . .

The camp was one huge mass of confusion, as there were about 15,000 men arriving that same day. When our turn finally came we ran the gauntlet of a dozen or so doctors, who gave us a very hurried examination. We were then marched to Headquarters, from where we were assigned to the different companies. I drew G company of the 302<sup>nd</sup> Infantry. This outfit was made up almost entirely of boys from the Cape, Plymouth, and the Islands. . . .



1	Name in full	Joseph Robert Kershaw	32
2	Place of birth	Falmouth, Mass.	
3	Date of birth	Dec 26 1894	
4	Are you (1) a natural born citizen, (2) a naturalized citizen, (3) an alien, (4) or have you declared your intention (specify which)?	Naturalized	
5	Where born (specify country, state or territory)	Woburn, England Great Britain	
6	If not a citizen, of what country are you a citizen or subject?		
7	What is your present trade, occupation, or profession?	Gardener	
8	If when employed, by whom?	V. G. Keith	
9	Where employed?	Quincy, Mass.	
10	Have you a father, mother, wife, child under 18, or a sister or brother under 18, wholly dependent on you for support (specify which)?	None	
11	Married or single (which)?	Single	Have (specify when) American
12	What military service have you had? Rank, branch, years, location or state.	None	
13	Do you have other complete or incomplete draft records?	Yes	
I affirm that I have verified above answers and that they are true.			
1068 Joseph Robert Kershaw (Signature or name)			

Top: Posters like this one promoting the YMCA were common during WWI. They were crafted to keep up morale and to get civilians involved in the war effort. Bottom: Kershaw's draft registration card can be viewed online (see postscript) or at the Historical Society's library.

Our first week was spent in roll calls, examinations at the infirmary, inoculations, and small details. It was hard to get used to getting up and going to bed early. Just the opposite of our habits in civil life. Then came the duty of saluting officers, and who of us knew an officer from a private. Perry and Schneider spent an hour each day saluting all officers, because they told a second louie that they didn't know they were classed as officers.

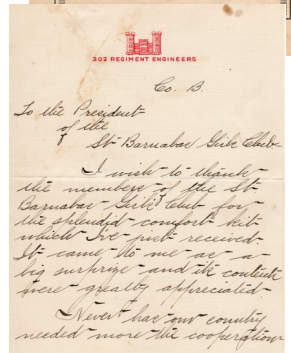
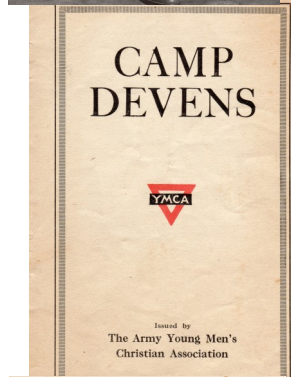
Our second week was the same, only different. We had physical drill, practice hikes, police details (consisting of a few men) sent out to pick up all the cigarette butts and match sticks around the barracks. . .

After the drilling finally soaked in, we settled down to eight hours of good strenuous work and drill each day. The company jokers were always on the job, and occasionally, the outcome would be a free for all. I remember one night, during one of these affairs, one of the boys got a disk of mashed squash and started throwing it around. One load struck my overcoat, which I had never worn. It got well soaked in and I had to borrow one to wear home the next day.

We had all the good jobs that were passed around. Room orderly, which gave a fellow a chance to sleep and kitchen police, which meant extra eats. Then there were the coal pile, the straw pile and the QM warehouse. These details were what made the fellows learn so quickly how to get out of working when they wanted to.

Evenings were usually spent with skull practices, guard duty, and when there was nothing else to do, by writing letters [and] attending shows at the Y.M.C.A. Then there were always dances and parties at Fitchburg, Leominster, Clinton, Worcester and Lowell.

In November, we started work on the trench system. We worked at this three days a week, mostly in zero weather, and it was some cold work. Many a lad developed a cold which turned into pneumonia, from this



Top: Irving Berlin (pictured in Life, 7/20/1942) composed "Oh, How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning" to describe army camp life in WWI.

Middle: The YMCA provided soldiers "good fellowship, and a touch of home."

Bottom: Corporal Crocker wrote to thank the St. Barnabas Girls' Club for the care packages they sent to Camp Devens.

life.

Had a Brigade inspection in Shirley, being reviewed by Gen. Hodges. This was the first real inspection we had had and as we made a good appearance, we were given a little cut in our work. Early in December, sixty of the boys were transferred to Camp Gordon. Among them were Handy, Lovell, and Martin, from Falmouth.

Was home two days before Thanksgiving and had to return and spend the holiday in Camp. The day after the holiday, the boys from the Cape were taken to Hyannis by special train, with the regimental band. We were late in arriving, but marched to Mill Hill with the band, were given a feed and then danced until about three o'clock. We were put up at private houses that night, and the next morning left for home. When I arrived at Camp three days later, we had to doll up for a Divisional Inspection by Sec. of War Baker. . . .

We were lucky enough to get out for over Christmas, which I spent at home, but we were put back again when we arrived, which happened to be my birthday.

On Feb. 2<sup>nd</sup>, I made my last trip home, as I was transferred to Camp Greene, N.C. the next day. Then I knew I would see action, as the 5<sup>th</sup> was a regular army outfit, and ready to sail as soon as they had filled their full complement of 75,000 men.

*J. Robert Kershaw  
(1894-1959)*

*To be continued . . .*

Learn more:

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[YMCA activities in World War I](#)

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*The Historical Society owns dozens of original World War I recruiting and propaganda posters like this one. Many are on display now in the Hallett Barn and Cultural Center as part of our exhibit "The Doughboys Go to War: A Commemoration of the 100th Anniversary of the United States' Entry into World War I."*