

SOLDIER LETTERS

Dana Ament Tells of Experiences
Langres, France,
November 27, 1918.

Dear Father:

This has been the second Thanksgiving for me in the army, and while I will not have the fine dinner of a year ago, still I think I have more to be thankful for now than I had then. In the first place the whole world has been freed from the worst enemy it has had in centuries, and we may reasonably expect to live in peace for the rest of our lives, at least. Then I have had the opportunity to help a little in it, and have come out safe and sound so far and that is no small thing to be thankful for, after seeing how much more some of the boys have had to give to win this war.

The censorship regulations have been lifted, according to the papers, but no official order has reached here, so I'm sending this by base censor. I'll give you a brief outline of where I've been and when:

I won't go into detail, however, as I'll just wait for that good day when I can step on that home door-step again to do that.

We started our career of "active service" on the morning of January 23, 1918, at 2 o'clock a. m. We had been herded on the old German boat a couple of days previous, and awaited the completing of our convoy, which was made up at several different points. It was bitter cold weather and the harbor was full of floating ice, but the boat furnished a little warmer sleeping place than we were used to, so it wasn't so bad after all. A little tug towed us out into the harbor early in the evening, and as we were not allowed on deck, we got what little glimpse we could of the retreating silhouette of the Statue of Liberty from a port hole partly open. It certainly sent a thrill through us when a sudden vibration in the ship told us we were finally on our way "Over There." Next morning we were out early getting our first real view of the boundless deep from the shipboard. We soon hit the Gulf Stream and the weather became at once warmer and we were able to get about without mackinaws and blouses for the first

time in months. The sea was rough all the way across and we could sit on the decks outside and watch the other vessels of our convoy wallowing in the heavy sea. The big battleship which sailed ahead of us seemed much more stable than the rest, and the waves only dashed against its sides and slung spray all over it. When within a couple of days of France we met the mosquito fleet. These little destroyers first appeared here, then there, then off somewhere on the horizon as they crossed your bow or ran along close, as they do in their zigzagging journey. You would swear there was nothing but a row of smoke stacks out there and the two wireless masts. However, when you did finally see the slim body of your active little guard it was painted in strokes and blotches about like a zebra, and you would consider it about the most apparent thing thereabouts. But there is a reason for these lines which I will explain when I get home.

The subs didn't get us, and we

all felt slightly disappointed at not having to shoot those guns on the bow and stern of the old boat. But it was lucky for us that we didn't as Fritz got one of our boats in a close following convoy.

On the morning of February 4, there was considerable stir on deck so I bestirred myself and went above, and lo! there lay the rocky coast of France. It was some sight! The first thing I noticed was the stone houses of France, and then I saw a real castle, and things came too fast for me to relate here.

February 6th, I put my feet on French soil and marched through Brest to the station in a drizzling rain. We received our first initiation into the French railway system here, and every one immediately formed a definite idea as to why the war had lasted so long. We boarded a string of coaches which looked about like our old stage coaches did. We also noted a sign on a French box car near by which finally translated, gave us a little uneasiness. It read: "8 Cheveau—40 Hommes" (8 horses—40 people.)

From Brest we went to St. Nazaire and here rested for several days during which we first got wet,

then tried to dry out without a fire, and then got wet again. We all had an opportunity to go up town several times, while there are received our first astonishing impressions of French customs and manners. Our stay was short here, however, and February 22 found us at the battle front camped in a swamp in Lorraine in pup tents. We were there for five months widening roads, putting in new ones, building ammunition dumps, and repairing old roads. We pride ourselves on our work when we think of the clockwork-like precision with which the St. Mihiel drive came off, for communication is the big secret of it all. We were not in the St. Mihiel drive, however, as we went over to the Chateau Thierry drive, resting two weeks at Ussey Sur Marne first. When we finally caught up with the boys, they were just across the Vesle river at Pismes, and at this point we did some good work. Having accomplished our tactical mission a truck company of 30 big Mack trucks was sent after us and we "high-bailed" it for the Argonne Woods. We were practically the first American troops in that sector and we saw the whole thing through. When I left the

company to go to school here, October 12, our company was working negro and pioneer infantry well toward Grande Pre to Newville on the roads.

As for myself I'm sort of a lost duck here, as is everyone else. We really belong to no units now, and I suppose rate as casuals, and will fill in where needed when the course is over. I hope to get back into Co. A, however.

It's almost dinner time now so will close, and love to all and a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to you.

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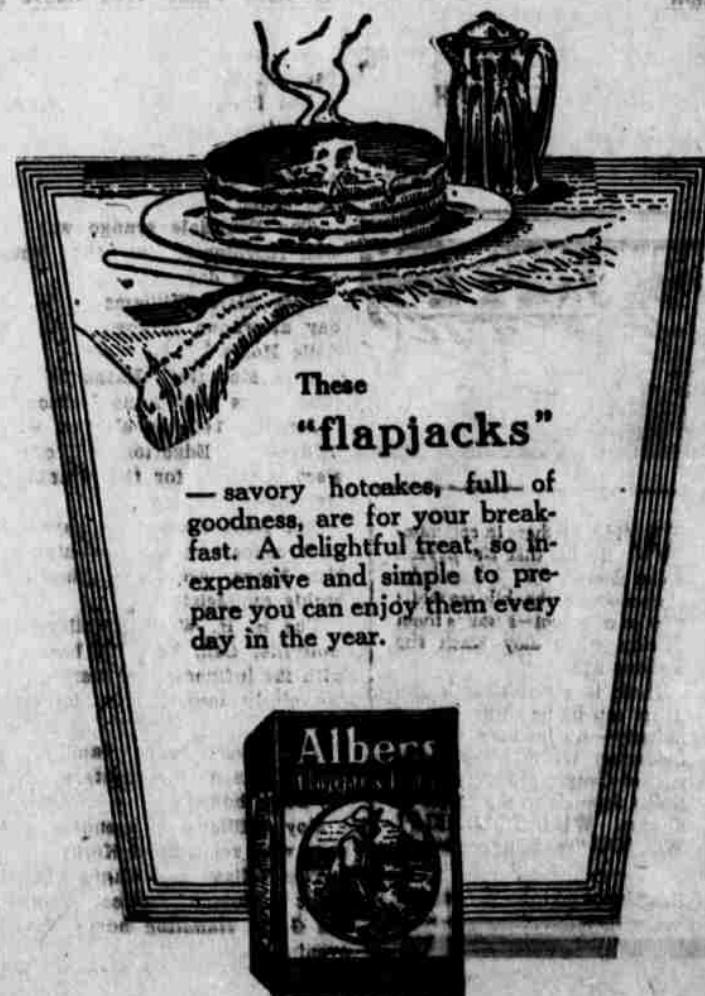
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