

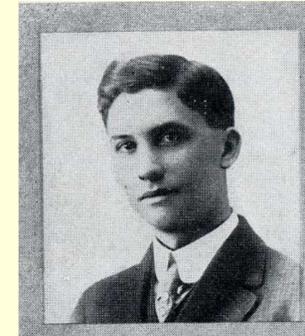
World War I through the diary, letters, & postcards of Chester W. Bidleman

April 23, 1917 "Put down my John Henry to join the army."

October 1, 1917 to April 13, 1918 - Basic training at Fort Doniphan



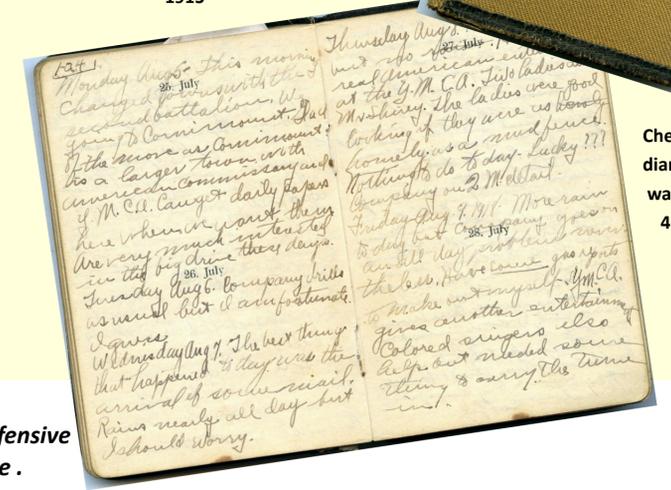
Kinsley High School
Class of 1913



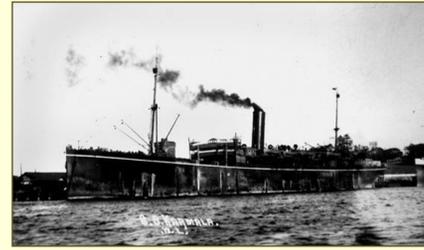
Kansas State Normal College
1915



Chester Bidleman's
diary carried in the
war measures
4.38" x 2.88"



This service star banner
with lock of hair was
hung in window by
Chester's mother,
Etta, to announce
that her son was
fighting overseas.
(Actual size)



April 24, 1918

"We were fortunate enough to be loaded on the Mauretania, the speediest boat afloat in New York, but it broke down and were transferred to the Karmala, an old fruit freighter and had to come over in a convoy. We were eleven days crossing, going around North of Ireland and landing at Liverpool, England on the 8th of May. Had a dandy daylight ride across England to Southampton, where we loaded on a freighter and crossed during the night of the 9th to Le Havre, France."

September 26, 1918 - November 11, 1918. Participated in the final, deciding operation of World War I which included the Battle of the Meuse-Argonne in the Lorraine region of France. 35th division was in the first line offensive following the opening 6-1/2 hour barrage of cannon fire. Served in the trenches near Verdun until the Armistice.

"Sept. 26. The barrage started last night at 11:00 and got steadily stronger until 5:30 when business really picked up for the Boche. Gas alarm given for us but no gas appears. The co. went over at 5:30 and took one town in 30 minutes. The first day's toll was not very heavy while prisoners and material was considerable...."

Sept. 27. Spent the day in Aubreville which has been for a long while under shell fire and there isn't one building left entire. Left at 2:00 P.M. with water for the trenches and at ten get as far as No Man's Land far back of front line. See my first tanks, incidentally see one burn up. The Frogies just flew and guess it was time to. The boys get out of reach of our artillery and the Boches snipes with three inch shells. Some rifles to snipe with.

Sept. 28. Third day of drive and the hottest one of all. The Boche comes over in the morning but the reception is too hot so returns to his own lines. He does lots of artillery work today along with much machine gun. If the Germans had the nerve of an American, the Germans would have cleaned the entire bunch up. Slept in No Man's Land last night and see the artillery in action this morning. Move up to Neuville this afternoon across from the Hospital. See the boys come in from the battlefield but only a very few of them are badly wounded. See a German aeroplane shoot down one of our balloons and gets away with it. This aeroplane war seems to be a friendly war any way. One side always stays away when the other side appears.

Sept. 29. Sunday, but all days look alike in the Army especially in a drive. My ties are nihil today so spend most of my time at the hospital looking for Co. "C" Think about two-thirds of the Co. has gone through the hospital already there is no chance of getting relief....

Sept. 30 Today is the last day of the drive for the 35th which I guess is a good thing as most of them are in the hospital now and the rest are nearly frozen as are in the rain every night and no blankets...."

In France, Chester trained in trench warfare. He helped maintain gas masks and instructed in their use. He was charged with obtaining and delivering clean drinking water for the troops.

July 20, 1918—Participated in the Aisne-Marne Offensive in the Vosges region. This was a rehearsed, night-time raid on a German encampment.

"3:55. Our barrage starts but soon begins to fall short. That is, one large gun does, killing one or two of us. There is one continuous roar from bursting shells and trench mortars. Boche starts his barrage which makes it worse.

4:10 All ready to go over. Barrage lifts and machine guns starts making the noise worse. The smoke and dust makes it hard to see anything. Boche machine guns locate us and begin their work. Very few Germans found in Laudersbach. Houses are about like dust heaps. All the caves are demolished.

4:40. Raid completed but Boche continues to send over shells. Three men are killed, 9 severely wounded and 5 slightly. Five Boche prisoners and between 20 & 30 killed. Would have got more but they fled at the first shot...."



"This is the result of the German's work. This town has been spared much more than most towns in this part of France. During the time the Germans held Saint-Mihiel, the French civilians were not allowed to live here but many have moved back now."

"This is what looks good when Jerry gets busy. Most of the dugouts are deeper and farther back in the hill than this one. In the right of the picture is a typical French wagon. Have never seen a real civilized wagon over here."



"Would I have enjoyed being in this procession but the Frenchies are the ones shown in this picture of Gen. Pétain's entry in Strasburg. At present things look like we are going to stay here for the winter or greater part of it."

"Nov. 11. At the 11th hour 11th day and 11th month of 1918 all firing ceases. Everyone is jubilant, and I guess they have a right."

