

#48 Chester Bidleman Joins the Army and Writes Home – Part 2

I will be continuing Chester Bidleman's letter that I started in the last post. It was written to his mother from Camp Doniphan and published in the Kinsley Graphic on February 21, 1918

"We were issued the rest of our equipment yesterday, even to bayonets and hob-nailed shoes. Of course, everyone is in love with the hob-nailed shoes. They are so heavy that the two pair we are issued will last the rest of the war, even if it continues for fifty years. At least they feel that way when we walk a mile or two in them.



Part of our company is to guard the lake from which the camp gets its water supply, for a week.

One day last week an airplane broke a propeller and came down just west of us. A man on a motorcycle saw him coming, so got off and ran. Guess he thought that in a case like that he could outrun a motorcycle. The airplane demolished the motorcycle, however.

Last Thursday night the grenade class made a night attack on the snipers' class. The snipers were in the trenches. We had to crawl through barbwire entanglements. Nearly all of us got stuck in the wire, but finally managed to get through. We had to crawl through on our backs. We use lumps of dirt for grenades, but not one got him, and it ended by both sides claiming a victory.

All the corporals and sergeants have been given combination cartridge belts for carrying both pistol and rifle cartridges. We do not have our automatic pistols yet, Am glad we are going to get pistols, as I think I would much rather shoot a German than chase him around trying to get a chance to stick him with a bayonet. They tell us the Germans don't like bayonets, but I don't think any of us do either.

Well, it is supper-time, and of course I can't miss out on that.

Sincerely, Chester"



Perhaps the bayonet was like this Remington M1917.

Chester had several interesting post scripts to this letter.

“PS -- Have my new wool suit at last, but it fits as though it had been “picked” a little too soon. But guess wool material is a little hard to get.”

Through sarcasm, Chester reveals that his uniform was made of 8.2 ounce cotton khaki. This is February and they are about to be sent to France where it is probably still cold and very wet. Wool repels water and at the same time holds heat, so I find it interesting that they are receiving cotton uniforms.

PS continued -- “Another boy of our company died last Thursday of pneumonia.”

Because the dates match, this undoubtedly is Hugh Matthews that I wrote about in Post #46. One of the artifacts that the Bidlemans allowed me to scan for the display is a panoramic picture of the company that was taken in November. I imagine Hugh is in this picture but I have no other image of him to be able to pick him out. It would be good if I could locate a relative who might have a picture so I could do so.

PS continued – “Have been helping in the quartermaster’s room for the past two days and have not had to drill much the past week.

Yes, I still have to go on guard, but a corporal gets to stay in the guard-house, and he does not have to “walk” a post and does not have to get on working details, unless he wants to, and you can imagine how many they get on.”

Chester has been promoted to corporal at this time. Previously he mentions getting the combination cartridge belts and now he talks of lighter duty.

PS continued – “Don’t be afraid of getting the socks too heavy, for we can wear socks an inch thick with the big hob-nailed boots”.

The women back home knitted socks, sweaters, and wristlets for the young men. See Post #25 for more information.

The letter ends there. I’ll be sharing more from Chester’s letters and diary in future posts as he proceeds to France and fights in the trenches.