

A DUFFLE BAG DIARY OF AN AMERICAN RED CROSS WORKER IN FRANCE

BY ELLIS E. WILSON

There was a similarity in the tasks of most American Red Cross workers who went overseas during the World War Period, 1914 to 1918. It was nearly a year later before A. R. C. activities lessened. The experience of one laborer in its ranks tells the story of many. Similar duties brought like ordeals. True there were often personal contacts which made particular impressions. A daily record hurriedly written could only be a jumble. A hop, skip and jump diary. A duffel bag into which was thrown promiscuously each day's doings and observations. Comrades are now widely scattered, yet in my memory there abide many names, several distinctive personalities, and numerous kindly faces. My early training being somewhat puritanical, may explain some of my impressions.

Herein is given a nine months daily memorandum as copied from my personal diary and from letters with some amplifications and clarifying written to my wife mostly from Paris, France. It is not put into print because of any particular worth it may possess but to visualize to persons interested, the every day occurrences the Armageddon-like conflict brought to those engaged in auxiliary war services. Not a history of the American Red Cross overseas, but the story of the trail traveled and of things seen, heard and done each day by one person. Individual experiences may in time be recognized as the truest and most interesting records of the war. A volume of perhaps more importance and greater interest could be written reciting the trials, adventures and afflictions of myself and comrades which were not set down in my diary. Too much matter of fact while the romance is lost. Each recorded event suggests a score of remembrances worthy of being preserved. Most grievous regret is that I failed to record each day the names of those comrades with whom my work brought me in contact. A. R. C. dangers were trifling compared with those of the soldier boys and—



ELLIS E. WILSON

Picture taken in 1916

We are thankful that we never knew
The Hell our soldiers traivailed through.

OCTOBER

The world is cold to him who pleads,
The world bows low to worthy deeds.

Tuesday 10-1-1918

Arrived at Camp Scott Barracks, Chicago, after having been home to Waterloo, Iowa, on a three day leave preparatory to starting overseas. Visited wife who is doing her share to win the war by operating her farm near Waterloo. Turned my pass home to officers in charge.¹ Enlisted Sept. 17, 1918. Stated in application that I had no dependents, that my wife had ample resources of her own. Many applicants asked for an allowance from Red Cross funds to support their families which was granted if volunteers were accepted. By order of the War Department, the American Red Cross is militarized and is mobilized and conducted as a regular military organization.

Wednesday 10-2-1918

On guard duty. Short time drill today. Major Harding advised us Company A would leave for Greenwich, Connecticut, in about ten days. Getting data for passports. Expedient to have guards on duty at all hours day and night. Many visitors passing in autos viewing the camp or stopping to see friends or relatives. Rigorous army discipline enforced.

Thursday 10-3-1918

On guard duty all day. Two companies occupied the drilling field, Midway Plaisance, Cottage Grove Avenue most of the day. Best of food on the tables. Auto driving tests. Applicants required to show their skill in auto driving at a preliminary examination. The test is made by having each drive an old Ford chassis with a loose board for a seat through a soft mud hole, then along on top of an old stone wall, turning

¹ All persons engaged in war activities were granted immunity from certain levies. The following order relieved me from paying any tax on my railroad ticket when purchased: "United States of America, The American National Red Cross Exemption Certificate, War Tax on the Transportation of Persons, The bearer Ellis E. Wilson is traveling on official Red Cross business from Chicago, Ill., to Waterloo, Iowa, and is entitled to tax exemption. L. E. Lord, Bureau of Personnel." New York Branch, National Headquarters.

at right angles with the wall or go into a cellar, up a hill, then down, then onto two planks, elevated at the further end, stop quick or go into a dump, and drive fast all the way. These tests afforded turbulent amusement to those who had time to be onlookers. Returned soldiers lectured apprising us of the rocks, shell holes, ditches and wire fences an ambulance driver must avoid on the battle fields.

Friday 10-4-1918

Members of Company A received passes to go up town to the city offices of the American Red Cross in order to have birth certificates and other necessary papers prepared for securing passports. Very little drill. Had my dinner down town. Wrote wife from Y. M. C. A. rooms. Photos for passports received at barracks. Caricatures and the boys howled. Pictures taken in groups and then separated. Only a few could be used on passports. A matronly maid patrols the sidewalks around the camp and warns giddy girls to beware the villainous boys wearing the khaki.

Saturday 10-5-1918

Some drilling. Day spent mostly in receiving orders. Dance at night. Major Harding says Company A will go to Greenwich, Connecticut Saturday, the 12th, for a week's stay before sailing. No one is certain about going. No passports have been received from Washington, D. C. The government officials evidently sought and received personal reports concerning every applicant. A few whose parents were of German birth apparently rejected for that reason alone.

Sunday 10-6-1918

Refused passes to go to church. Had pictures taken second time in Edelweiss Hall. Plenty of breakfast and lunch. Took a hike. Sailor girls played and there was dancing all evening at barracks. Numerous Chicago boys are enrolled in Companies A and B. This was a farewell party for Company A. One recruit who was an excellent singer dropped from roll. Narcotic user.

Monday 10-7-1918

Up at 6 A. M. Roll call. Everyone ordered to shave. Company A took a hike and then had breakfast. Short drill before dinner and a lot after. Letter from wife with personal

recommendations as to my fitness for the work, which were handed into headquarters. Mr. Woodward of Chicago requested me as a personal favor, to look after his young son and report to him. A long hike after supper. Letter from wife with photos for my passport. The pictures taken by the Red Cross photographer are so unsatisfactory that many of the boys furnish their own. The fact is the photos would not sufficiently identify the holder of a passport.

Tuesday 10-8-1918

Went to Federal Post Office, Chicago, in auto with a bunch of fellows to sign up applications for passports. Came back to Camp Scott on elevated railway. After dinner officers told Company A men they would have a two day furlough. Could do as we pleased. Took a walk with others to Jackson Park and Lake Michigan. Back to camp for supper. In evening went to movie. Wrote two letters to wife. Most of Company A have gone for a visit before starting east. More than one half of Company A are residents of Chicago or its environs so a two-day pass was sufficient for them to say good-bye. Two girls wearing men's khaki overcoats slipped past the gate guards at the entrance to the wire enclosed tent field and made merry with the boys.

Thursday 10-10-1918

General routine work at the barracks. Why the saltpeter the boys are asking. Most of them have returned from furloughs and are ready to go. Have suit cases filled with various articles but cigarettes predominate. One friendly comrade who was detailed to make up the kits told me he had put a very fine pocket knife in my outfit. A Chicago citizen gave me an auto ride up town and then I rode back to the camp on street cars arriving before gates were closed. Sleeping in a tent now.

Friday 10-11-1918

Appointed to oversee and line up a squad of recruits. Called before Lieut. Byram who addressed me as Sergeant and told me to go to his office and take charge of it which I did. At desk all day. Promotions and changes come quickly, and why certain things are done it is not soldier-like to enquire. We are expected to do promptly what we are told.

Saturday 10-12-1918

At desk all day as clerk of Company A and until late at night. Given overseas suit, trunks and complete outfit. Clerk's job a badly mixed one. Called regiment roll in morning. A few absentees to report to officers. Each trunk contains at least two suits of underwear of good material, some all wool sweaters, socks, knife, scissors, needles, all sizes of safety pins, buttons, in fact every little as well as big thing that the Red Cross women could imagine might be needed for ourselves or to help the soldier boys in France. A generous outfitting, thanks to the Red Cross ladies everywhere. My knit sweater is marked Bay City, Michigan.

Sunday 10-13-1918

At desk all day. Boys busy getting grips and trunks packed. Taken down town in evening in trucks and autos and got on train for New York City. All of Company A, about two hundred men and boys. A noisy bunch until late. Slept in car seats made comfortable with baggage and blankets. Am forgetting about business matters at home. Away we go, Protestant, Catholic, Jew, loyal Americans, everyone ambitious to do something for his country. A hilarious night ride which all seemed to enjoy and they sang,

There's a long, long trail a-winding
 Into the land of my dreams,
 Where the nightingales are singing,
 And the bright moon gleams;
 There'll be lots of drill and hiking,
 Before my dreams all come true,
 Till the day when I'll be going
 Down that long, long trail with you.

Pack up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit Bag,
 Tipperary,
 Keep the Home Fires Burning,
 You're Going to Wear a Crown.

Monday 10-14-1918

Woke up at Sandusky, Ohio. Had breakfast and dinner on train. Arrived at Buffalo at 2.30 P. M. New York State landscape nice and green. Boys making commotion all the time. At Buffalo we were given candy and cigarettes and at

Albany the same. Down Hudson river on east bank. Too dark to see the sights along river. Recalled some ten years ago when brother Frank and I rode on an excursion boat from New York City to Albany and return. Had been to Boston with Advertising Men's Excursion.

Tuesday 10-15-1918

Arrived at New York City about 3:00 A. M. Major Harding took us to depot restaurant and we had a light lunch, don't know who paid for it. Had my shoes shined, also paid for a shine for Mr. King of Laporte City, Iowa. Went back to our coach but were routed out and transferred to New Haven Railway. Reached Sound Beach, Connecticut about 6:00 A. M. Marched south about one mile to "Ye Old Greenwich Inn" located on Long Island Sound. Had a nice breakfast. At beach looking for shells. Helped the doctors inoculate in afternoon. Trunks and grips arrived by truck O. K. The Inn is a large wooden building and a well furnished summer hotel which had closed for the season. Leased to Red Cross, and used to house the boys until sent overseas. Inoculation against fevers started at once. Three shots.

Wednesday 10-16-1918

This place is called Camp King. Boys eating apples and hunting for star fish, oysters and stone. Found a broken arrowhead, also a fine specimen of a conglomerate stone which I will try to send home. We have the best of everything to eat. Lieut. Byram relieved of command of Company A and went back to Chicago. This relieves me of my duty as his clerk. Much jealous strife. Lieut. Fellows made captain of the company. Fine old orchard of choice variety of apples located on hotel ground of some five acres. The landlady tried to reserve the apples on a few trees, the best ones of course, but they were soon gone. The sea air is invigorating and the boys are always hungry.

Thursday 10-17-1918

Ordered to report to wait on tables at noon which I did and while carrying dishes from dining room was called to officers headquarters and told that I was made a sergeant, was to have charge of hospital headquarters as clerk and was to have an assistant. Moved my trunk and suitcase downstairs and took

charge of hospital desk. Do not have to report at roll call nor do I have to get up with the bugle. I am promoted to a very important task. Each person has to take three fever inoculations. Often the boys faint from the thrust of the needle. All had been inoculated for smallpox at Camp Scott, Chicago. Some one stole the cash from the hotel till.

Friday 10-18-1918.

In office all forenoon. Mrs. Jewett, mother of one of the boys sewed red crosses on the boys' caps. Took a walk along the beach. Made myself useful in office dealing out medicines and hearing complaints, most imaginary. Was called on and made a speech to the boys at the supper table. Some for various good reasons have been released and gone home. A few of the younger ones are homesick when they find they are up against real soldier life. Getting up early in the morning at bugle call, drilling, guard duty and other tasks. Attempted to cheer them up. They might get a pension some day.

Saturday 10-19-1918

Attended to my duties as medical sergeant. Dr. Irvine also Dr. Huffington went back to Chicago and Dr. Henderson of Stamford, Connecticut is to take their place. Took a walk on beach. Dance in evening at neighboring hotel. I went over about nine o'clock but few were present so came to my room. Crowd of local girls came later so fellows said. Turned in my old overcoat and got a new one. Had sergeant chevrons sewed on my coat. The people of Sound Beach are very friendly and do everything possible to make our stay in their village pleasant. Fine summer villas owned by wealthy New York City citizens located along the Sound. The owners give the boys many auto rides and are exceedingly kind and generous to wearers of the khaki. Regular U. S. army uniform with Red Cross insignia.

Sunday 10-20-1918

After breakfast in office. Not the law office of Wilson & Worthen, Waterloo, Iowa, but of Medical Department of American Red Cross, Camp King, Ye Old Greenwich Inn, Sound Beach, Connecticut. A walk on sea wall to the east. Man and wife at a fine villa stood at attention for a salute from me which I gave. Balmy east wind all day. Man in

fine mansion invited me to come into his home for a visit but told him I could not do so. Against orders. But we talked as he stood on his sea facing lawn and I on seawall. Owners of these villas have heavy stone wave protecting walls all along waters edge. A safe pleasurable footway on top of high wall for long distances. Sea breezes, water or sand bars on one side of walls and fine parkings and homes on the other. The man at this villa was interested in the Mesaba Iron Ranges of Minnesota and had many questions to ask about the middle west. I could stand on the wall and talk with him which I did but we are not allowed to visit in the homes of local people without permission.

Monday 10-21-1918

Fred Lundin, my assistant sergeant, took care of office most of day. Afternoon walk on beach wall. Talked for a half hour with a lady who was fishing. She said she and her husband were lawyers with offices in New York City. She was certainly an adept at fishing for she had a long string of sea crappies. Owns a cottage at the beach, but it has been wrecked by the waves because the seawall in front was not strong enough to withstand the force of the waves. Accidently dropped one of wife's letters and a dashing wave carried it away. Mailed picture of Ye Old Greenwich Inn to my sisters, Emma L. Allen of Waterloo, Iowa, and Elsie L. Schenk of Memphis, Missouri.

Tuesday 10-22-1918

Have one red eye from being out in the sunlight yesterday, army cap not sufficient protection. Complaint because caps have no leather visor to shade the eyes. Company B arrived from Chicago and with them Sergeant Marqua, who will be in the Medical Department. Company B is made up of a fine lot of fellows and their military maneuvers are equal to that of well trained soldiers. Culprit who robbed hotel money drawer apprehended and drummed out of camp, uniform taken from him, given a cheap suit of civilian clothes, marched to Sound Beach depot by guards, given ticket home and put on train.

Wednesday 10-23-1918

Rounding up things to accommodate Company B. Hotel

crowded. Did not inoculate members of Company B in afternoon as was expected but waited until evening when forty-nine were treated. Sound Beach civilians serenaded camp with songs. Expected Company A would vacate before Company B arrived but sailing of ocean liner on which they were to leave has been delayed.

Thursday 10-24-1918

Attended to my office duties. Letter from wife regarding public farm sale she is to hold. Ambitious are seeking favors. A wise man knows his limitations. Many recruits realize their inefficiency along certain lines because of lack of military training which is most prominent at present, and with other comrades can say with the poet Robert Duncan—

Indifference is the armor that we wear
 To keep us from vain jealousies and jeers
 We walk unruffled past the scers
 Unmindful of each soldier's stare
 For we will work among them debonair,
 So utterly oblivious of their careers,
 That they shall marvel at one who fears
 No hidden threat, wherever he may fare.
 They shall not know our armor has worn thin
 They shall not guess our sun is sinking low,
 Our banner stained and tattered by each word
 Like gleaming spears. If lance thrust tear the skin
 We will not eringe. And we alone shall know
 There dangles at our side a broken sword.

Friday 10-25-1918

Helped inoculate a few recruits. In my hospital office about all day. It was intimated that I was not at present time to go overseas with Company A, but would be retained at my office duties until Company B was ready to go. Captain Fellows and others whose passports have not come are to wait. Company A is to leave for Quebec Sunday by train. Letter from wife saying her public sale had been put off on account of influenza by order of the Iowa State Board of Health. Influenza not causing any trouble at Sound Beach Camp.

Saturday 10-26-1918

Attended to duties in office. Miss Blank, a nurse of thirteen years experience, to be in hospital service. Inoculated

several of the newcomers. In afternoon with three companions went for a long row boat ride along Sound. Got horseshoe crabs and periwinkles. A goodbye banquet for Company A. Lobsters, clams, oysters, then speeches, followed by a dance. Red Cross money paid for this banquet but the occasion required a cheerful start for the workers. When walking along the beach, picked up some broken Indian arrowheads.

Sunday 10-27-1918

Everyone retired by twelve o'clock last night after the banquet and Camp King was very quiet. About one hundred twenty-five fellows of Company A ready to leave for Paris, go to Quebec tonight. Auto ride to Sound Beach Railway station. Company A marched. Miss Engle gave me two boxes of cigars to distribute to the boys which I did. She said her father, Charles Engle, donated them. Returned to barracks in auto with Sergeant Payne, driver, and others. Company given an abundance of practical advice. Each member appeared to visualize his respective duty and the important tasks to be performed. The thing most talked about is submarines. One recited,—

If by the Heinie's hand I fall
Mid the noble and the brave
A tear from my lady love is all
I ask for my soldier grave.

Monday 10-28-1918

Office work. Took walk on sea wall. Went to Stamford on street cars to get medical supplies. Dinner there at hotel \$1.50. Sergeant Lundin with me. Let jeweler repair wrist watch which wife gave me. It stopped in one-half hour after I returned to camp. The village drug stores of Sound Beach do not carry a variety of hospital supplies sufficient to meet the demand of the camp making it necessary to go to Stamford to secure them. Take this trip daily. Red Cross guards in most towns and villages to keep watch of the boys that they do not visit saloons or violate orders when away from headquarters on leave. Local residents say Connecticut will never have prohibition. Yankees were against such a law.

Tuesday 10-29-1918.

Attended to my duties as medical sergeant. In afternoon drove to Stamford and left wrist watch for further repairs and bought a few medical supplies. Beautiful houses along the Sound and a delightfully pleasant place to live. The homes are mostly owned by wealthy business people in New York City. Commuters.

Wednesday 10-30-1918

In afternoon went to Stamford. Got my watch paid \$1.00 for crystal, etc. Drove past old stone fences built by first settlers of boulders and limestone picked up from fields and old colonial houses of historical interest no doubt if their story was known. Just a little excitement every day about when another bunch may go over, passports, etc. For myself say nothing. Will do as ordered. It is understood that when the present volunteers are sent overseas, enlistments will be slackened until spring and a detail of officers will remain in charge of Camp King during the winter.

Thursday 10-31-1918.

Smoky Indian summer on the Sound. In afternoon Mrs. Palmer, whose husband is a New York City dentist came in an auto and took five of us to her home for a pink tea, back at five o'clock, a nice time, cider, tea, sandwiches, cake, piano playing, a little dancing. Rules and regulations very strict because of indiscretions of some of the boys. The hotel cook was fired after breakfast. Strong guard on duty to prevent Hallowe'en pranks. Liquor can be easily obtained and although it is against the order, some of the boys are given to drinking, often causing disturbances but most of them keep faith with their home ideals and do not indulge.

NOVEMBER

Friday 11-1-1918.

No hallowe'en pranks in camp. Went to Stamford, bought medicines, etc., \$1.05. Miss Blank took charge of medical department and I was ordered to report to headquarters which I did. Was given office work. I certainly have some friends. Gossip—. It was said that a certain volunteer contributed \$2,000.00 to Red Cross work that was made a lieutenant. Sev-

eral of us in row boats loaned by generous Sound Beach residents took a spirited trip along the Sound. Watched the gulls. Looked for curios.

Note: That \$2,000 lieutenant never appeared overseas.

Saturday 11-2-1918.

Reported at office headquarters and filed a few letters. My passport to England, France and Italy, along with others came from Washington, D. C., and I signed the same ready to be viséd. Invited out with five other fellows to a little party in village. Received pass for two hours. A lady came for us in a Packard auto and gave all a fine ride along Sound. Dance in evening at Inn. Three Clinton, Iowa, girls, Red Cross workers from Washington, D. C. here. A middle-aged fellow who kicked about the cooking, stayed out all night and next morning was found on the beach when tide was out, picking up and eating oyster from shell. He was taken home.

Sunday 11-3-1918.

No passes to go to church. Rev. Barney of the Congregational Church at Sound Beach came to the Inn in evening and preached. A collection was taken for him but the amount was small. Boys have very little spending money. Said something about sheep. Better if he had talked about horned goats.

Monday 11-4-1918.

At offices. Hotel getting ready for new contingent. Company C coming from Chicago. Wholesome Sound apples in orchard about gone. Some of the trees must be a century old. A few pears also.

Tuesday 11-5-1918.

Company C arrived at ten o'clock A. M. Company B marching to Sound Beach depot to meet them. Ye Old Greenwich Inn filled. Because of infractions of regulations several mischievous boys were confined in the guard house which in army language is called the "hoosegow," on a bread and water diet with green apples for dessert. Our daily life seems to be made up of a series of incidents. And some who were fat are getting thin and some who were lank and lean are getting fat.

(Cont. in Next Issue)

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