

Personal Narrative
of
1st Lieut. Henry D. Gregory.

December 4th, 1918.

In compliance with Circular 110, Office of the Chief Signal Officer, American Expeditionary Force, the following narrative of my personal experiences and observations is submitted.

My service with the American Expeditionary Force began in January, 1918 when I was ordered to France from the 40th Division at Camp Kearny, California. On landing in Europe, I was sent to the Signal School at Chatillon sur Seine. There were thirty six National Guard officers attending this first session of the school, all sent overseas as casuals for training in advance of their divisions. We all arrived at Chatillon after the school had started, missing the first week of instruction. The technical equipment of the school was not nearly so ample as it has since been made, owing to the short time the school had been running. The lectures were held in a warehouse that was dark and chilly and were given by a force of instructors that seemed to delight in rising above such things as dark and cold to give us the benefit of their experiences in the trenches. The very first impression I got of the American Expeditionary Force was from this group of instructors under the leadership of Col. H. B. Black, ignoring the discomfort of that schoolroom in their intense desire to show us how to get results when results were needed.

That idea of the necessity of getting results is the most valuable thing that I brought away from Chatillon. The lectures were often quite technical and theoretical and not illustrated by equipment. The talks divided themselves into three classes for me, -first, subjects that I had studied in college, -second, trench lore that was based on lots of common sense, and third-theory that was far over my head. Among the students of this session were a number of reserve officers who were electrical engineers in civil life. The electrical part of the course was very elementary to them, but I noticed that, when the examination results were posted, the engineers were often outranked by men who were soldiers first and technical men second.

When the school closed on the ninth of March, I was ordered to the Eighth French Army for a tour of observation on the Front. This was a privilege given to the twentyfive men who stood highest in the class. My place was third. The days that I spent with the French were beautiful but they were not very warlike. That sector of the Front was used by both sides as a rest area and nothing very serious was staged there. I had a number of arguments with the lieutenant who was with me as to the necessity of a distributing frame in a telephone central station. One day we visited a dugout that settled the question. The thirty lines entering the station were led down the entrance in a box twelve inches square, fanned out at the doorway and led through the door frame in slits, one slit for each two wires. Thence the wires ran across the ceiling of the room and down the opposite wall to the switchboard, with no system, no care, no protection other than that on the switchboard. There was nothing but a tangle of wire.

After eighteen days with the French, I reported to Major Ruby D. Garrett of the 42nd Division at Luneville and was assigned to B Company of the 117th Field Signal Battalion. The Rainbow was

taking over a division sector from the French for the first time and my first work was the installing of the telephone system at the new headquarters in Baccarat. That same job has been done a good many times in France, but I doubt if another officer has tackled it who knew so few of the men who were to do the work. I had been with the battalion but a single day, but by putting the separate parts of the work up to the noncommissioned officers I managed to complete the entire project in plenty of time and in a thorough and workmanlike manner.

A little later I was shifted to the Signal Platoon assigned to the 165th Infantry. The regiment was in division reserve, recuperating from its first tour of duty in the trenches and its first taste of German gas. I started a course of practical instruction to keep the men in proper form with their instruments, although the platoon had but eleven men in it. What leads me to speak of a condition that I have never known different—the shorthandedness of the Signal Corps especially in officers. Every battalion with which I had served has been short from three to eight officers. On paper the full quota may have been assigned, but always some were away at school, on detached service, on duty in the office of the Division Signal Officer or otherwise unavailable for duty with the battalion. The shortage of men is not so serious as the shortage of officers, but it exists.

My experiences with the regiment in the line were only mildly thrilling and may be ignored. I saw a few striking examples of what is required to live at the front, but on the whole there is nothing to tell of the days that I spent in the trenches. On the first day of May I was transferred to the 168th Infantry and the next day received orders to return to the United States for duty as instructor. Then and then only did I know that my entire tour of duty with the Expeditionary Force was designed to make me an instructor. I am sure that if I had known that fact sooner, I could have made myself of more value to the Government. There were many times when I ignored radio work in order to make the telephone system function more efficiently and many times things happened that a notebook would have kept on record to rouse the interest of the battalions training in the States.

After four days at Gondrecourt, where the instructors of the First Corps School pumped us dry of information, nine of us Signal Corps men left for Brest. We had a quiet trip, comparing notes and trading experiences. From New York we were sent to Washington and the Radio School. At College Park, we were shown the latest developments in American apparatus and witnessed demonstrations of the wireless telephone. At the Laboratories in Washington, we answered countless questions as well as we could in accord with our experience.

From Washington I went to Camp Custer as assistant to the Division Signal Officer of the 85th Division, Major G.F.N. Dailey. My work was very light and scarcely what I had expected as instructor. I had the pleasure of telling the officers of the 310th Field Signal Battalion a few things about the sort of equipment they would find in France, of the familiar things that they would find missing, and of the work that they would probably be called on to do. Since returning to France, I have met Major E.O. Baker and learned that I gave them just the information that they found most valuable, although when I gave it I thought it of minor importance.

After ten days at Camp Custer, I received orders to go to Camp Kearny for assignment to my old battalion, the 115th. I sup-

3.
posed that I would of course be called on to do some instructing. Imagine my surprise when I was put on a company duty basis and never asked a single question by my superiors about work in France. I did my work as company officer and spread the gospel of 'Getting Results' among the men of C company, to which I had been assigned. The men were very anxious to learn what they might expect to find in France and eager to hear whatever I told.

While at Camp Kearny, I was ordered before a board of medical officers for examination. These officers declared me fit for domestic service only, but the three brigadiers of the division decided that my experience in France was too valuable to lose and therefore overruled the board. When the battalion left Camp Kearny I was still a member of its official family, but naturally I wondered how long I could succeed in doing the work.

After a hot and tiresome trip across the continent and a third trip through the submarine zone, I reached France a second time. The battalion was assigned to billets near La Guerche where I had the good fortune to be in charge of two platoons of C company quartered five kilometers from the remainder of the battalion. After settling the men in the first billets they had ever seen, I started a school to bring to the men a better idea of the work that they would have to do. My instructors were the noncommissioned officers who had done similar work at Camp Kearny. The sergeants talked through most of the period and, just before dismissing the class, I would tell the men how things really were. Often my few words overruled completely some of the things that they had learned in Camp Kearny.

After three weeks at La Guerche, the battalion was detached from the 40th Division and sent to Chatillon sur Seine for final training. I was much pleased to be able to see again Major H.G. Chase and others of the instructors who had given me my start in February. At Chatillon the battalion had three weeks of intensive schooling during which I did a large part of the instructing. At the end of the training, the battalion was ordered to report to the Chief Signal Officer, Second Army.

When we arrived at Toul, I was pleasantly surprised to find that we should be under Col. Black and still more pleased when I was ordered to report to him for assignment to duty. I was made Post Signal Officer, Second Army, and immediately had my hands full providing telephone service for the officers on duty at the Headquarters.

In closing my narrative, I wish to state that I feel that the United States Government has not received the full benefit of the time or money spent in training myself and others as instructors. In France, all officers try all the time to perfect themselves in their branch of the service and to keep their knowledge up to the latest minute. When I was in America, the officers with whom I was thrown did not care to learn what I knew about the Signal work overseas, judging from the number of questions asked, after leaving Washington.

H.D. Gregory
1st Lieut. S.C.