

St. Mihiel<sup>1</sup>  
370<sup>th</sup> Infantry

November 5, 1918

Dear Mama,

Thank you for the last letter from you and my sisters, which was very encouraging. I'm glad the military was able to tell you all about what happened to me, because I've been in no shape to write for the past few weeks. Since you asked for the details, I guess I'll tell you what I remember, which isn't much.

It was late September<sup>2</sup> and we were advancing through the Argonne without much resistance - I hadn't even fired my rifle yet. My platoon was crossing a road and I don't remember what happened. From what the boys tell me, Barry, the guy marching beside me, triggered an anti-tank bomb called a "mine," which was buried in the ground. I have sketchy memories of waking up in a lot of pain and seeing my legs all bandaged up. Apparently they had to keep me on the front for quite a while and it took a long time to get me back to a proper hospital. The stretcher-runners can only take wounded back at night, and then you gotta wait until morning again since the ambulances can't drive at night on account of their headlights drawing fire.<sup>3</sup> The doctors say that if I had made it back to a hospital sooner, I might not have gotten infected and they might not have had to take my legs.

The good news is that I'm going to live. And I haven't gone crazy like some of the other guys in the hospital. The soldier in the bed next to me just stares out the window all day with a vacant look in his eyes.<sup>4</sup> Right now I'm thinking I wouldn't mind getting Jim Crowed as long as I can get the hell out of France.

I think the best thing to do now is try to find a job for me for when I get back stateside. Are there any schools in the states yet for disabled soldiers? I've heard good things about a school in Paris,<sup>5</sup> but I don't speak a bit of French and I don't want to stay overseas. I hear they can teach you to do all sorts of different jobs, even for people who are blind or missing arms, and I don't think missing legs is as bad as that.

Money shouldn't be too much of a problem with all the new benefits in place for war cripples. They tell me that since I'm missing both legs that I'm at the 100 level of permanent disability, which means that I get a

\$100 per month pension.<sup>6</sup> Also, since we decided it would be better for me to take a pay cut for the \$10000 War Risk Insurance just in case I got injured, I'll get an extra \$57.50 each month for the next 240 months.<sup>7</sup> Since I'm short both of my legs, I don't really see a need to buy wood legs. I hear they have nice realistic looking ones now,<sup>8</sup> but I'm not sure if it would be worth it since I wouldn't be able to walk anyway. What do you think? I'll also need a wheelchair once I get out of this bed.

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<sup>1</sup> Many of the troops participating in the Meuse-Argonne offensive were taken from St. Mihiel, a town recently taken by the Allies. Spartacus Schoolnet, "Meuse-Argonne Offensive," *Encyclopedia of the First World War*, <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/FWWmeuse.htm> (Accessed June 2, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> The Meuse-Argonne campaign began in late September. Spartacus Schoolnet, "Meuse-Argonne Offensive," *Encyclopedia of the First World War*, <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/FWWmeuse.htm> (Accessed June 2, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Tullidge gives an account of how it would often take a while to get soldiers proper medical care because of complications like this. "War Surgeons Find Amputation Easy: Excuse Lies in the Fact that Proper Dressing is Often Impossible Near the Front," *New York Times*, Sept. 16, 1916, X12.

<sup>4</sup> Many soldiers were severely mentally affected by their war experiences. Some are described in "Men who come back from the front," *The Survey* 36, (Aug. 5, 1916): 487.

<sup>5</sup> "School for War Cripples," *New York Times*, Feb. 11, 1915, 3.

<sup>6</sup> Soldiers were rated from 0 to 100% disabled for purposes of determining disablement compensation. In the U.S. a soldier had to be permanently disabled and rated at least 10% in order to receive full pension. International Labor Office, *Compensation for War Disablement in Great Britain and the United States*, Geneva: 1921, 7.

<sup>7</sup> Soldiers could have part of their salary deducted to pay for War Risk Insurance of up to \$10000, which was paid off on a monthly basis if the soldier was injured or killed. International Labor Office, *Compensation for War Disablement in Great Britain and the United States*. Geneva: 1921, 16-17.

<sup>8</sup> See pictures of prostheses in Orr, Thomas G, *Modern Methods of Amputation*. St. Louis: The C.V. Mosby Company, 1926. See also McMurtrie, Douglas C. *The Disabled Soldier*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1919.

## Secondary Sources

Bourke, Joanna. "The Battle of the Limbs: Amputation, Artificial Limbs, and the Great War in Australia." *Australian Historical Studies* 21, (1998): 49-67.

Guyatt, Mary. "Better Legs: Artificial Limbs for British Veterans of The First World War." *Journal of Design History* 14, no. 4 (2001): 307-325.

Spartacus Schoolnet. "Meuse-Argonne Offensive." *Encyclopedia of the First World War*. <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/FWWmeuse.htm> (Accessed June 2, 2005).

## Primary Sources

Amar, Jules. *The Physiology of Industrial Organisation and the Re-employment of the Disabled*. London: The Library Press Ltd., 1918.

Devine, Edward T. *Disabled Soldiers and Sailors Pensions and Training*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1919.

This book provides an in-depth look at disabled soldiers and their rehabilitation, particularly from economic and financial points of view. It describes current war re-education techniques and how a disabled soldier might go about becoming a productive member of society. In a way, this source is like a combination of the International Labor Office and McMurtrie's sources, which are annotated below, along with some economic analysis.

International Labor Office. *Compensation for War Disablement in Great Britain and the United States*. Geneva: 1921.

This volume is comprised of numerous government documents dealing with compensation for disabled soldiers from various Allied nations. It provides a comprehensive description of military pensions and war insurance available to soldiers in the United States, both of which are very relevant to my character. This seems to be the best source out there for detailed information on government policies regarding war pensions and re-education.

McMurtrie, Douglas C. *The Disabled Soldier*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1919.

This was the best source I found on the rehabilitation of disabled soldiers. It gives a detailed account of the rehab facilities and policies present in many different countries, including the United States, Great Britain, and France. The section on the U.S. was particularly useful, giving a brief history of the development of war re-education infrastructure during the war as well as examples of opportunities both currently available

to disabled soldiers and those that are planned for the future. It also happens to have been read by medical professionals, military officials, and administrators from the Red Cross Institute for Crippled and Disabled Men.

Orr, Thomas G. *Modern Methods of Amputation*. St. Louis: The C.V. Mosby Company, 1926.

This book is a great source for an overview of amputation techniques and prosthesis technology in the WWI era. It is well-organized, concise, and presented in an easily readable manner. It also has numerous high-quality drawings and photographs that are better than I could find in any other books or journals. This makes it more useful than most book sources for a project like this; it is easy to get a good general idea of what amputation and prosthesis were like at the time without having to read 400 pages of technical detail and medical jargon.

“Finding work for men crippled in war.” *Review of Reviews* 53, (Feb. 1916): 226-228.

“Men who come back from the front.” *The Survey* 36, (Aug. 5, 1916): 487.

Although it is a short article, it provides vivid descriptions of disabled and wounded soldiers returning home from the front. Most of it is comprised of excerpts from a letter written by a man in Sweden who witnessed trains of wounded men being moved off the front. The letter, which describes the soldiers as “husks of men” with their “sprits broken,” conveys emotion that cannot be found in other publications.

“Reconstruction work and the victory liberty loan: What its Success Means to the Soldiers Discharged as Disabled.” *Current Opinion* 66, (May 1919): 333.

“School for War Cripples.” *New York Times*, Feb. 11, 1915, 3.

“War Surgeons Find Amputation Easy: Excuse Lies in the Fact that Proper Dressing is Often Impossible Near the Front.” *New York Times*, Sept. 16, 1916, X12.

This article was useful in getting an idea of what surgery and amputation were like in the field. It contains statements from a decorated Red Cross surgeon who has some detailed, very interesting insights into surgery on the front. As with the “Men who come back from the front” letter, this article provides a unique, firsthand account of events during the war that is difficult to obtain even from other primary sources. Books and scholarly articles cannot provide this type of description.

## Images

March 1919. Wounded African American Soldier Greeting Crowd at Parade. [Online] Available:

[http://gale.corbis.com/search/detail/detail.aspx?c=arthistory&search=amput\\*+and+world+war&p=1&psz=30&pos=5&t=17&imgid=10359438&cache=y](http://gale.corbis.com/search/detail/detail.aspx?c=arthistory&search=amput*+and+world+war&p=1&psz=30&pos=5&t=17&imgid=10359438&cache=y) (Accessed June 2, 2005).