



A Diary of World War I

**In Memory of
Private First Class
Charles C. Coats
(1895-1975)**

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His Silver Star -

The general order citing the bravery of Private Coats was written on the very day peace came, November 11, 1919 at the headquarters of the fifth division A.E.F. France.

Private First Class Charles C. Coats...In the Meuse-Argonne offensive the foregoing named men, all of the 9th Field Signal Battalion on duty with the 6th infantry, displayed conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty, maintaining in the face of enemy fire the several means of communication at all times. By command of Brigadier General Castner: Ray K. Chalfant Major and Adjutant.

The corps commander cites the fifth division for forcing against the enemy in position a crossing of the river Meuse near Dun and Brieuilies, building bridges and swimming the river in face of machine gun and artillery fire and advancing some nine kilometers in the enemy's territory. The action enabled the French corps to advance...broke the line of resistance of the German army compelling its withdrawal.

His Diary -

January 21, 1918 Enlistment Pvt. Charles C. Coats Co. C. 9th FB S.C.

Leave Marion, Ind. January 21st. Arrive Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas January 23rd. Receive one inoculation, for typhoid. Leave Ft. Leavenworth Jan. 30th for Leon Springs, Texas. Arrive there in training camp Feb. 2nd. A fine trip across states to the sunny south. Corn wooly, canned tomatoes and bread, with a little coffee for chow, can you beat it, well anything tastes good when you are really hungry. We're ~~en~~ training at Camp Stanely. We had setting up exercises, foot drills, visual signaling, two more inoculations and a vaccination. Fully equipped here except side arms, gas masks and helmets.

Leave Leon Springs Texas March 28. Travel across 17 states and after a very enjoyable trip in U.S. Pullmans we arrive at Port of Embarkation April 3rd. Said Camp located at Camp Merritt, New Jersey. This being a rest camp, in preparation for our overseas journey. After three weeks here, we again entrain for N.Y.

April 24, 1918. Embarking on U.S. Transport Hurrion. This ship started on its illfated voyage Tues. April 25th with all soldiers on board in high spirits, on account of the thought of at last being on the briny deep, bound for a foreign country.

Our really first adventure came while on board this boat, and sooner than we had anticipated. To make a long story short, we were rammed by another transport, 500 mi. out. Seemingly for no conceivable reason, however the thought that we came off with whole skin, and were able to make it back to port, was enough to make us very thankful indeed, that it wasn't any worse. Arrive again in N.Y. harbor May 1st, disembarked and May 2nd, embarked on U.S. Transport Kroonland. Again with spirits running high, for the thought that we had passed thru one adventure with safety gave us renewed enthusiasm.

This voyage was made with out incident, in exactly two weeks. Arrive in St. Nasaire May 16th and were very much interested in French manners and customs. We were at this place just one week, when we were entrained again by U.S. This time in sure enough box-car pullmans. Traveling a little North of East, we at last arrive at Arrienteirey, France May 22nd and again got settled in comfortable quarters. It was here that our Signal school was organized May 26th; Lectures on electricity, gas mask and map sketching. School broken up May 31st. Foot drill and calisthenics June 1st. Sat..

Leave Arrientieres June 2nd, 3 O'clock P.M. Arrive Bona Role 4:30 P.M. hike with full pack to station, rest in oat field, some of the Co. the worse for wine. Entrain about 6 P.M. for front, in box cars full of straw, not much sleep first night, too much fun. Everything we buy, we get skinned. Arrive at small station June 3rd. Five mile hike with full pack to village, and an awfully hot trip. Several fall out on account of excessive drinking.

Arrive at Bar Seroux about 6 P.M. Now in quite sector near Swiss border. Volunteer for K.P. June 4th. As usual, I nearly eat too much, while in the kitchen. Regular lantern, foot drill, and gas mask drill resumed until June 11th. when the old original C. Co. is split up for good. I am transfered to 2nd. platoon from 3rd. with 51 others. Move about five miles and are attached to Co. of Signal doughboys, 60 infantry.

From June 11th. our work periods are changed somewhat. Re-
villie at 5 O'Clock A.M., Breakfast from 5 to 6:20 A.M. Fall
in at 6:20 for regular work. Time taken up by lantern and wire-
less operating classes. T.P.S. sets explained in afternoon by
learning to send messages in code.

Already to move at any time, into the trenches and active
service. Dismissed at 4:30. A good lecture on Thurs. in regard
to drinking and disipating.

60th. Inf. have a good band so of course we are enjoying some
good music. That is all for June 14, 1918.

June 15th. Packing up this morning to go into trenches. Am
rather peeved on account of a mix up in N.C.O.'s orders regarding
rolling blankets. Not much head used by N.C.O.s, but maybe they
are doing the best they can. Am waiting now for orders to march.
March ordered at 6:00 P.M. On this march we are in the foot hills
of the Voges Mtns. and believe me this proved to be a never to be
forgotten trip. We marched until 4:00 this morning, with one hours
rest at mid-night and hot coffee. It was about all we could do to
wiggle when we got into this place this morning. We are now bill-
eted in an old theatre, but we have a piano and some music so why
worry. We slept on the floor til noon. The best rest I believe
I ever had, so am feeling fine, after our twenty mile hike.

Are pretty near German lines, for a great many of the buildings
are torn to pieces, by high explosive shells. French soldier
brought in dead this morning. One arm and one leg shot off by high
explosive shell. When our turn comes we are going to give them
hell! and no mistake. Expect our chance will come this week. Every
thing reports that we are getting the best of them, but I must say
they are a formidable enemy.

June 17th. sent with three other sammies to Wessembach to re-
port for duty in the trenches. My partner and I are signal men,
and the other two are telephone men. The two telephone men stay
at Wessembach, but me and my partner are sent to the front line.
trenches. We are now in charge of a signal station with two French
soldiers, and are located in a dugout for quarters. Stood guard
last night, but nothing happened to speak of except a few bullets
spitting around occassionally, but "if you want to see your father
in your father land, keep your head down Aliman"

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Night before last, Germans tried to surround our position here. It was our first night for the boys, but the Germans found out we were not asleep. We accounted for about 203 Germans, and I don't think our casualties, gas and all amounted to over 50, and we still have the hill! Our machine gun boys did great work. One fellow had to be dragged away from his gun after the upper muscle of his right arm was all shot away. He was still at his post, shooting with his left hand when relief came. Hurrah! for the boys in Kaki.

This is June 18th. and all is quiet. Well here I am back to write a little more trash. This is June 29th. so you see I have been neglecting this diary. There hasn't much happened to speak of though. We have done guard duty 2 hrs. apiece each night, and things have been awfully quiet, except a little artillery action. Two more deaths in the Hdq. outfit which I am temporarily attached to. One was accidentally shot by a sentry, and the other was found dead. It is known that he had considerable money on him, and this was gone, so foul play is suspicioned. A person never knows when he is going to get a bullet around here. They are apt to shoot first, then talk afterwards. It is awfully hard to see our boys lying where they fall, so far from home, but home and friends must not become so dear that they are purchased by chains and slavery, so we are here to win victory over German militarism, or lose our lives in the attempt. So much for this time.

Left trenches about July first. Sgt. in charge of my pal and I goes off and leaves us up in the hills for no conceivable reason. We had to march into Laveline ourselves, and consequently, by the time we arrived in town, our outfit had been gone about an hour. However it was lucky for us, for they took a road which was frequently shelled and sure enough, when Fritz (Germans) saw the outfit, he began to throw shells. We had not been in town but about ten minutes when our outfit began to straggle in from all directions, some with equipment, and some without equipment. When the bombardment began the boys were given the order to scatter, which I guess the boys would have done without command, for Fritz was getting the shells pretty close. Shrapnel hits a good deal like a shot gun anyway. It was every man for himself, after they scattered. It

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was certainly miracular the way our boys got out. By falling on the ground and in ditches all of our boys escaped, except two. One of these men was slightly wounded in the arm. The other one wasn't hurt at all, but he owes his life to his pack. A piece of shrapnel went thru his blanket rolled up around his pack, making six ragged holes. That same evening after we had gotten part of the bunch back, we scattered out, about fifty feet apart and slipped out of town on another road. When we arrived at a town about six miles away, we waited for the rest of the bunch. In two days they were all in, and would you believe it when we called the roll, the whole out-fit were present, or accounted for. I think we were pretty lucky!

Left this place in trucks on the evening of July 4th. We traveled all night, arriving at our present location on July 5th. hungry and sleepy. Have been going to school here ever since the 5th., and this is now the 11th. They can leave me here until the war is over if they wish, but we expect to leave here in about another week, for a more active sector. This place I think is called Pruex or something like that. We have pretty good accommodations here, but there is quite a little dissatisfaction on account of financial trouble. We haven't been paid for about two months and a half, so consequently most of us are broke, not a very pleasant sensation indeed, for we are in a place where we could buy a few things if we had the where with. So much for July 11th.

This is now the first of Aug. so you see this thing has been sadly neglected. Attended school at Paureux about one week, then was given a sudden order to move. We were not so lucky on the last hike, as we had to foot it again with a seventy lb. pack. This trip proved to be the hardest we have made yet, of course we took two days to make forty miles, but still we were about all in when we got into St. Blaze, the second morning about 3:00 AM. One thing, we got some much needed rest for a week in this place, in fact, I believe that was the most pleasant week I have spent since I landed in France. Here we had access to a good swimming hole, and believe me we took advantage of that. I went swimming twice a day for a whole week, I think.

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On the 20th. of July five or six other fellows and myself were chosen for operators. I had been studying the buzzer phone for some time, but this was my first chance to take charge of a station. I am still with three other operators at this place whose code name is Montana. We are working six hr. shifts, so you see we have it pretty easy, on duty six hrs. and off eighteen. They can leave me here in this place for the duration of the war, if they choose, but I suppose it will be move again before long. The only trouble we have here in this dug-out is fleas. We had a bunch of them out here on the table, playing leap-frog the other night, and it was quite interesting. They are not quite as bad as they were, for we now have a powder, which is somewhat of a preventitive.

August 21st. you can see that I have again neglected this, but there hasn't been much of note happened. We are still at this station Corelnot, but we are expecting to go out at anytime now. Our relief came in last nite. I might say that we have been shell-
ed three times while here, but no casualties, except accidental.

Don't know where we will go now. Aug. 26th., another month passed, and believe me, in this month we have seen some service. We left the St. Blaze Sector about Aug. 23rd. From there, we went back to near Pauxeux. Was there about three days and then started for the St. Maheil Sector. We marched nights, and slept in the daytime, and this proved to be one of our worst hikes we have ever made. It proved to be a seven day hike, and we were due in there in time to go over the top the next morning, after the big American barrage.

The sixth and eleventh Infantry marched all night, and went over the top as soon as they arrived. There is nothing like the American spirit and nerve. They can't be whipped. Our advance was a success in every respect. We advanced in some places to a depth of 5 miles and took, in the neighborhood of 8,000 prisoners. I had the pleasure of seeing a great many of these prisoners as our doughboys marched them to the rear. Our advance was not made without some cost of human lives, but in comparison, it was extremely small. The worst that our 60th got hit was the night before we were releived. We wanted to straighten the line before leaving. By some inconceivable reason the Germans got wind of

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this, and sent over there barrage about ten minutes before ours was scheduled to start. It caught our boys in formation and in three Co's of the first Btn. The casualties were at least 50%. Some of our Signal Corps. boys covered themselves with glory on this particular occasion, for they worked anyplace where they were needed, mostly in dressing and caring for the wounded. It was a trying time, and those who came out without a scratch considered themselves lucky indeed.

We are now in a rest camp at Liverdun, and it is a real enjoyment after what we have passed thru. We can buy anything we want here, but naturally, as usual, I am broke, tough luck!

In Liverdun just one week when we start, once more hiking, toward the front. About eight kilometers we strike a town near Foug, called Germanil. Here we were located about a week. We had some drill, and a little signal school here. When we left this place the whole division was moved by trucks toward Verdun.

After a twenty-four hours' ride we disembarked once more near Marvincourt. Here we figured on getting a little rest, but by eight O'Clock that night we had orders to move once more. This time we moved up about eight kilometers to what is called the Argonne woods; we arrived here about the first of October. While in these woods waiting orders to move on in to the front line, we got the glad news that the central powers had asked for peace. Of course, this caused much unfounded enthusiasm. On the 11th of October we moved on to the front line, and arrive at Madeline Farm on the morning of Oct. 12, Columbus day. My partner and I had just made our bed in the woods and had lain down when we were called to go over the top, with the third Btn. We hadn't had any sleep for three straight nights and had been continually hiking, but duty was calling so we gladly went. Well, I hope I never have to go through another twenty-four hours like that. We were in a shell hole, without any protection whatever and under direct observation of the Germans. By aeroplane they finally found out our Btn. P.C. was in that particular hole. They then put over one of the worst barrages I ever witnessed of 75's, 155's and machine gun fire. If they had gotten one shell in the right spot it would have killed every man there. Despite this, we kept up communications with the regimental, by telegraph and telephone all day and throughout the night. By some peculiarity we were missed, although we

were covered with dirt from exploding shells several times. We would have been forced to remain there even when relief came had not a dense fog dropped at daylight. Under the cover of fog the Btn. was relieved and believe me we were ready for a little rest.

We received a hard counter attack by the Germans the whole time we were in this time, but our front line held. When our regiment was pulled together behind the lines we only had about nine-hundred men left in the whole outfit. We were at once relieved for a few days rest. Our out-fit moved back about seven kilometers, but remained there only a few days, when we were called in again, by this time the Germans were back on the Meuse river, or in the towns next to the river.

Here we once more established our communication lines under heavy shell and machine gun fire. We took Clare La Grande, Clare La Petit, and Dunn Ser Meuse, three of the most important towns in that vicinity. On Halloween night our boys crossed the river under a most withering fire. When the Germans saw we were going across, despite their resistance, they pulled stakes and ran.

From here on until the 11th of Nov. the fighting was much easier, but they resisted until the last hrs. before the Armistice was signed. Even the day before the 11th. our supply train was shot up, while moving up, and our signal corps. out-fit had to do some maneuvering to get out of range of some of their heavy artillery.

It was hard to believe, even after all the guns had stopped belching forth their death and destruction, that it was really over. In fact everyone greeted the news with more or less skepticism. It has become a fact now, so we are a happy bunch of boys. Words can't express our feelings. Having been in the front line fighting for six weeks, we were relieved immediately after the 11th. and retired to the town of Leon. Here we rested until the 17th. When all the Army of occupation began there move toward Luxemburg border. We have hit the towns of Louppy, Marville, and two or three small bergs.

We are now in Colmey, waiting orders to move on toward Luxemburg. Up to Nov. 27th. (day before Thanksgiving), Thanksgiving very quiet and not much to eat, corn-wolly and hard-tack with coffee for dinner. A bunch of us got mad. Another fellow and I told

the boys to whet up their appetite, for we were going to have something to eat for supper. We started out, but couldn't find anything but a large Belgium Hare rabbit. We paid \$7.00 for it, but I made the lady dress it, and cook us some vegetables with it. Say, it sure did taste good, and we had our Thanksgiving after all.

Orders to move from Colmey the 6th. Started about 7:30 AM, hiked with full pack for two days. At end of first day, we were in Longlaville, where we stayed all nite. Left Longaville at 7:00 AM, Dec. 7th. Crossed boundry, between France and Luxemburg about noon, arrived in Bergem, Luxemburg about 3 O'Clock PM today, Dec. 8th, Sunday.

Went to Beckinberg this morning. Bought some candy and a few souvenirs. Expecting to leave this place before long. Now 7:00 P.M. Leave Bergem Dec. 9th. for German border, march thru Bett-emberg Helligan and Aspelt, arrive in Dalheim about 1:30 P.M. Quartered in another barn, still a very pretty country. People are very sociable and kind. Am now in a Cafe enjoying the heat from a good stove. Should have left here this morning at 8:00, but the orders were changed, so don't know when we will leave now.

Saturday, nite, Dec. 14th. and we are still here in Dalheim. Our 9th Field Btn. moved back to Esch, so we are expecting to move any day. Today we had a drill and games until noon, this afternoon an inspection. I certainly hope we leave here before long, for I am tired of this place.

Moved to Esch Dec. 16th, and remained there, marking time, until July 8, 1919, when we were ordered to entrain for Brest.

We are back in Gods country now. The good old U.S.A.

August 2nd. in Sherman, expect to leave for our homes the 5th.

Finis

