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# La Peninsula

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World War I:  
Two Soldiers Write Home

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To discover the past and  
imagine the future.

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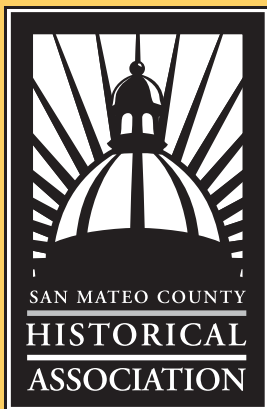
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California, and administers  
two county historical sites,  
the Sanchez Adobe in  
Pacifica and the Woodside  
Store in Woodside.



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**Cover:** *Coming Home from Town*, sketch by Burlingame's Alvin Page Colby, c. 1918.

# With Love to All, Iler:

## Letters from a Camp Fremont Soldier

Letters by Iler Owen Watson



Iler Owen Watson when he was stationed at the Presidio, 1917. The portrait was printed as a postcard to share with family and friends.

### Introduction

The United States entered World War I on April 16, 1917. Camp Fremont, in Menlo Park, became a temporary home and active training ground for thousands of soldiers of the 8<sup>th</sup> Division of the United States Army. As the platoons of men drilled for expected battles in France, the sights and sounds of mock battle caused great excitement among local residents.

These young men were destined for duty as part of the American Expeditionary Forces (A.E.F.), the United States Army fighting abroad. However, their duty station was Russia. They arrived in Siberia shortly before the war ended with the signing of the armistice on November 11, 1918. The A.E.F. presence in Russia was

part of America's reaction to the Bolshevik revolution.

One of the soldiers who trained at Camp Fremont was Iler Owen Watson. He was born in Indiana on July 1, 1898. After 1900, the family moved to the San Diego area. Iler's letters are written to "Dear Folks." The envelopes are all addressed to his father, W.H. (William Harvey) Watson. Iler's mother, Anna, had died when he was young. By World War I, William was married to Martha, the mother of his younger children. Iler had one older brother Leonard Ray. He also had younger siblings Oliver Tyler, William Clyde, Ellen Irene, Clara Marie and Elizabeth Harvey. Apparently, he referred to several siblings by their middle names in the letters (Ray, Irene, Marie and Harvey).

When he enlisted at 19, Iler was a farm boy from Potrero, San Diego County. Perhaps due to growing up on a farm, he focuses on the weather in many of his letters. He was at Camp Fremont with Company M, 62<sup>nd</sup> Infantry. In Siberia, he spent much time in the Army Hospital, having been forced to march with full equipment when he was not well.

Copies of 27 of his letters are in the Archives of the San Mateo County Historical Association. A family member sent them to an Association volunteer when a research paper was being written on Camp Fremont in the 1970s. All of his surviving Camp Fremont letters and selected letters from San Francisco and Vladivostock, Siberia, are included in this article.

Watson's use of punctuation was spotty. He seldom used apostrophes. Note, for contractions don't is written dont, haven't is written havent, didn't is written dident, hasn't is written hasent, won't is written wont, couldn't is written couldent, wasn't is written wasent and isn't is written isint. He seemed to use commas and periods interchangeably, and he did not use question marks.

## Letters from San Francisco, California

Fort McDowell  
July 16, 1917

Dear Folks -

I passed Medical examinations today in the infantry. They sent me From San Diego to Los Angeles Cal and then to Angel Island in San Francisco bay. I dont know ~~where I am~~ how long I am going to be here. I dont know of anything more to write so will close soon for this time.

With Love to all,  
Iler  
Adress (sic) on other side

Presidio S.F.  
Aug. 1. 1917

Dear Folks -

Will write you a few lines to let you know that I moved again, over to Presidio in San Francisco, and was assigned to M. Co. 62nd Infantry. I received your letter and was glad to hear from you and got a letter from Ray also. I sent him one of my pictures but dont know if he got it yet. I got my rifel (sic) and have been having bayonet practice and gun drills there is nothing hard about it if you keep your ears and eyes open. Ray said mabye (sic) papa was going over to he (sic) valley, and has he gone yet. M Co. goes on the rifel (sic) range on the sixth and will be gone from here about a week. Well I don't know anything more to write so will have to close for this time. Write soon,

With love to all  
Iler O. Watson

<sup>1</sup>. Tecate was one of the small camps on the California section of the Border patrol.

<sup>2</sup>. The Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.) was a far left group, sympathetic to the Russian Revolution. In 1916, the I.W.W. passed an anti-war resolution.

Presidio, S.F.  
Aug. 12, 1917

Dear Folks -

I received your card and was glad to hear from you. I just came back from Fort Barry rifle range Friday and was on kitchen police the same day. There is about 100 men in this Co. and there is lots of dishes. This is not like the Tecate camp<sup>1</sup> where each man washes his own dishes, but we wash them all, but it is easy work it is the first I have had to do since I enlisted.

The I.W.W.s<sup>2</sup> over at Oakland beat up a couple of soldiers and about six hundred soldiers went over Friday night and chased them out and dumped all their junk in the street and burned it up. The corporal here told me a minute ago that he heard over at headquarters co. that they was going to load us on a transport and ship us somewhere. Well I must close for this time, With love to all,

Iler  
Co. M. 62 Inf  
Presidio

November 1, 1917  
[Presidio, S.F.]

Dear Folks -

Received your letter and was glad to hear from you. I was sick four days last week but am all right now. We had an inspection and muster yesterday by the Colonel. I am going on guard duty at Ft. Mason tonight at five oclock. I dont think I can come home Christmas as most everybody bought liberty bonds and now the government is going to take \$15 a month more away from us so we will only get five dollars a month tell about next July.

Well I will close for this time. Write soon.

With love to all  
Iler



Part of Company M, 62<sup>nd</sup> Infantry, in front of the Palace of Fine Arts in San Francisco. The 62<sup>nd</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiments marched down to Camp Fremont in January 1918, completing Camp Fremont's 27,000-man, four-regiment 8<sup>th</sup> Division.

### Letters from Camp Fremont, Menlo Park, California

Camp Fremont  
Jan 9, 1918

Dear Folks –

Will write you a few lines to let you know I am well and hope this will find you all the same, and you will probably notice by the heading that I am not at Presidio, S.F. anymore, but at Camp Fremont about 30 miles from Frisco. We hiked down under heavy marching order but took three days coming down here.<sup>3</sup> It sure looks like we are going to have a year, as it stays clear up here if it is, it is going to be hard times. I got your letter today and hope dad is feeling better. Say what company is at Tecate now. They split up the 63 infantry and are going to make home guards out of them, and I heard that they had sent some to the border near San Diego. Well guess I will close for this time,

With love to all  
Iler Watson  
Camp Fremont  
Cal.

<sup>3</sup> The first night of the march was spent in Daly City, the second night in San Mateo.

Camp Fremont  
Feb. 16, 1918

Dear Folks –

Received your letter a few days ago and was glad to hear from you. Hows the weather down there it look like it is going to rain here. Hows everybody down there. I am well except for a little cold in my head. We took the gas test last week and every thing came out allright (sic) but if my gas mask had not been any good I sure would have been a dead one as that gas is deadly if you get your lungs' full. I think this 8th division will be on its way to France soon as we are getting well equiped (sic) in everything, but it will have to be filled up to war strength first. I guess they will fill us up with drafted men soon as the next draft comes off. I wonder what is the matter with Ray as I dont ever hear from him anymore. I only heard from him once since I have been at Fremont. I would like to come home once before we go over there, but I dont think there is any chance of getting a pass now. Well I guess I will close for this time

With love to all  
Iler  
Co. M. 62nd Inf  
Camp Fremont  
Cal



Marching at Camp Fremont. Courtesy of the Menlo Park Historical Association.

Camp Fremont  
March, 17, 1918

Dear Folks –

Received your letter a few days ago and was glad to hear from you. Hows everything down there nowdays I guess you have had plenty of rain down there for we certainly have had plenty here and it looks like we are going to get more as it is cloudy and are having a windstorm now. They are sure putting us through these ropes now as we have a new Major-General<sup>4</sup> in charge of the camp and he sure makes everybody move. We drill from 7 in the morning till 11.30 and from 1 till 3.30 in the afternoon. Well I have been in the army just 8 months yesterday. I thought then that I would be in France by this time but I dont believe we are ever going over there from the way things looks now. Well I guess I will close for this time.

With love to all.

Iler

<sup>4</sup> Major General John F. Morrison took command of Camp Fremont in March 1918. Formerly stationed at the Army's school center at Fort Leavenworth, he placed great emphasis on training.

Camp Fremont  
April. 8 [1918]

Dear Folks –

Received your letter a few days ago and will try to answer. I am feeling pretty bad with a cold and a little fever I think for I went up to the dispensary a little while ago and the doctor said if I wasent any better he would send me to the hospital in the morning. There has been about fifteen men in this company go the hospital with fever in the last three or four days. They sent a bunch back today as they were not very sick. The 12th and 62nd Regts. hiked out to the target range today and the 62nd got lost and went away out of the way and had to hike around and find it. Tell Mrs. Minto I havent anymore pictures, and besides I believe she wants them to hang in the store room and keep the rats away. Well I guess I will close for this time with love to all,

Iler





Medical tents at Camp Fremont.

Camp Fremont May 4 1918

Dear Folks –

I received your letter today and was glad to hear from you I am well and hope this will find you all the same. How is everything down there, is the hay and stuff doing any good. I guess it is getting awfully dry there now isnt it. How does Oliver like to work as Gaskills. I sapouse (sic) he is bigger than me now isnt he, but tell him I bet I can kick him any way for we have to put on the boxing gloves every morning for drill.<sup>5</sup> Dad wanted to know if I have been in the guard house yet, gee I guess he thinks I am wild and tough since I been in the army. I havent been there yet, but do you remember Dinkins of B. Co – 21st that was at Tecate, he is here in the 62nd gaurdhouse (sic) he transfered (sic) to the G.M. and went absent for a while so they milled him. We have been on the target range quite a bit lately, and I am getting to be an expert with a rifle I made 14 bullseyes out of 15 shots rapid fire we have to shoot them in one minute and a half. Well I guess I will close for this time with love to all,

Iler

Co. M – 62nd Inf

C. Fremont

Cal

P.S. I got a letter from Ray yesterday.



Soldiers playing pool at Camp Fremont. Courtesy of the Menlo Park Historical Association.

<sup>5</sup> In 1975, Joseph B. Longuevan, a Camp Fremont soldier, explained why boxing was used in training:

“By virtue of holding the title of both Company Boxing Instructor and Assistant Regimental Bayonet Instructor, it became evident why boxing instruction became part of infantry training.

“The stance in both instances was identical; the position of the arms and fists in boxing being the same as in holding the rifle at the fixed bayonet, and the position of the feet and legs likewise the same.

“In boxing (and applied to bayonet fighting), the movement of the feet forward, backward, and to either side, was done in such fashion as to never being caught off balance....

“Additionally, and irrelevant to bayonet fighting, the movement of the arms and the fists in boxing were taught for both offense and defense.”

From a document in the San Mateo County Historical Association Archives.

Camp Fremont  
May 20 [1918]

Dear Folks –

Received your letter a few days ago and was glad to hear from you. I am well and feeling fine and hope this will find everybody down there the same. I guess it is pretty hot down there by now isn't it, it has been pretty cold and windy here for the last few days. Well this outfit is getting filled up now. We got about two hundred recruits in last week, so I guess we will not stay here for long. They made ten new corporals last week and I happened to be one of them. I will send you my warrant soon as I get something to send it in. There is sure some big men in this company for they picked out all the six foot men and sent them to "M" Co.<sup>6</sup> I wonder what is the matter with Ray I have only heard from him about once in three months. I guess I will close for this time, with love to all

Iler

Camp Fremont  
June 15, 1918

Dear Folks –

Received your letter a few days ago and will answer this afternoon. Hows everybody and everything down there. I may be able to come home in a few weeks but am not sure, there were two turned down yesterday on account of the shooting season opening Monday and the commanding officer (sic) don't want anyone to miss it. We had a big parade last Sunday down at the Stanford University stadium. There were eight different regiments in it. Tell Marie that I don't have to wash dishes or walk post anymore since I was made corporal. Well I don't know of anything more to write so guess I will have to close for this time.

With love to all  
Iler

Camp Fremont  
June 21, 1918

Dear Folks –

Will write you a few lines to let you know that I am still on the map, but don't know how long I will be. There is something in the wind now for we have to turn in all our extra clothes and they are transferring all the men that are not able for overseas duty, it is rumored (sic) that the four artillery regiments are going to leave in a couple of weeks for the east, and also the four infantry regiments for Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas.

I am going to try to get a furlough and come home for a week. It is probably my last chance to see you folks before (sic) we go over and there sure is none afterwards. If I can't get a furlough I will send you some money, although it isn't much but will help. Hows everything down there. I suppose (sic) it is hot as ever down there, it sure is here. We was on the rifle range last week. We show the new Enfield rifle and I can't hit the broadside of a barn with it. Well I guess I will close for this time.

With love to all  
Iler



Training at the pontoon bridge at Felt Lake, Camp Fremont.  
Courtesy of the Menlo Park Historical Association.

<sup>6</sup> According to his discharge papers, Iler was 5'10¼" tall.





Soldier writing in tent at Camp Fremont.

Camp Fremont  
July 22

Dear Folks-

Will drop you a few lines to let you know I arrived in Camp Fremont safe and sound and in plenty of time.<sup>7</sup> Gee it seams (sic) funny since I got back, I sappease (sic) Oliver has changed his mind about enlisting in the Navy. All these fellows that were on furlough came back about five or six days overtime and the Captain did not do anything to them. Hows everybody around Tecate. Gee I didnt know anything about drill when I got back. They had done away with the old drill and are useing (sic) some new stuff from France. Well I don't know of anything more to write so guess I will have to ring off.

With love to all  
Iler

<sup>7</sup> This letter is believed to have been written after a furlough home.

<sup>8</sup> Trains moved the soldiers from Menlo Park to Fort Mason. Loaded onto two transport ships, 3,355 officers and men sailed for Siberia. They arrived on September 29, 1918. They joined the 1,863 officers and men who had left Camp Fremont for Siberia in August 1918.

Camp Fremont  
Aug 16 [1918]

Dear Folks –

Will write you a few lines and let you know how I am, am feeling fine now. Hows everybody there. Well at last I am going over the water, to Russia. The lieutenant (sic) called up a bunch of sergeants and corporals and asked them if they wanted to be reduced to a private, so they could go over. Some of them backed out, then he called me up and asked if I wanted to go and I said sure, so I am a private now and booked to go sometime next week. They didnt have enough privates so some non-coms had to be reduced so they gave the volunteers a chance to go first. The funny part of it is, that the ones that didnt want to go as privates were bursted and have go just the same. This time next month we expect to be on the heigh (sic) seas. The transports are in Frisco bay waiting to take us over. I hardly think I will leave here before the middle of next week, at least. Well I guess I will have to close for this time, with love to all

Iler

Camp Fremont  
Sept 1 [1918]

Dear Folks –

Will drop you a few lines this morning to let you know I leave for Siberia today at about noon.<sup>8</sup> This is probably the last you will hear from me for a long time for it will take about six weeks to go across. Well I dont think of anything to write so this will be all for this time and will write as often as I can and let you know how I am.

With love to all  
Iler



American soldiers arrive at Vladivostock.

### Letters from Vladivostock, Siberia, Russia

Pvt Iler O. Watson  
H.Q. Co. 31st Inf.  
A.E.F. Siberia

Oct. 10, 1918

Dear Folks –

Will drop you a few lines to let you know where I am now. We are quartered in large stone barraks (sic) in Vladivostok. I got here in the latter part of September. I just came out of the hospital yesterday morning. I got a cold in my head and it has caused ear trouble. I will have to go back next week and have my tonsils taken out as they are badly diseased and is the cause of my takeing (sic) cold so often. We had a pretty good trip over there was no rough weather all the way across. I was twenty eight days comeing (sic) over but we stopped a Hokodate (sic) and Otaru, Japan.<sup>9</sup> I managed to get off at both places. I havent been over this city yet as I been in the hospital most of the time, I havent got much to write so will close for this time. Hoping to hear from you soon. With love to all,

Iler

<sup>9</sup> Hakodate and Otaru are both port cities in Japan.

Iler O Watson  
Cpl. Headquarters Co. 31st Inf.  
A.E.F. Siberia

Vladivostock  
Nov. 10, 1918

Dear Folks –

Will drop you a few lines this afternoon to let you know how and where I am. I am feeling fine and still in Vladivostock. I havent written for a long time, its because there is nothing to write. I havent heard from you yet. I got a letter from Ray that he wrote the day after I left. I would like to hear from you often as I can its pretty lonesome over here. I guess you will have a good winter over there, but I think it is going to be a long cold one here, as it freezes every night here and the ice stays in the streams all day, it snowed a little here last week but wasent very cold. I don't know if I told you in my last letter that I have been assigned to Headquarters Co. 31st Inf. and was made a corporal on Nov. 3. This is a pretty good Company. I belong to the signal platoon and all there is to do is learn to use buzzers and telephones and flag signaling. We dont do any guard. You folks should not worry about me for there is nothing whatever to worry about. The only... [letter censored].

...in service the same time I did. Well I guess I close for this time hoping (sic) this will find you well and happy,

With love to all,  
Iler



Corporal Iler Watson (left) in Vladivostock.

Cpl. Iler O Watson  
 Headquarters Co. 31st Inf.  
 Am. E. F. Siberia  
 Vladivostock,  
 March 25, 1919

Dear Folks –

Will try to write you a few lines today and let you know that I am well and feeling fine. I guess this is about the only letter I have started out like this for some time as most of my others started out “I have been in the hospital” but hope I will not have to do it again, it is getting warmer over here all the time and think that will help me very much as this severe cold weather does not agree with me very well. Well folks hows everything and everybody at home. I havent recieved (sic) but one letter from you in about a month, but recieved (sic) several while in the hospital, so you see I dont know much of whats going on at home. I must be getting ambitious lately as I have been on guard and writeing (sic) this letter all in the same day, that is an awful spurt of energy for me. I am getting so lazy over here that I dont know what you folks will do with me when I get home again.

There was a letter returned to me here that I wrote to Ray in October addressed to him in San Diego, he must have moved before it reached there. I dont know why he dosent write anymore as I havent recieved (sic) a letter from him in several months.

I met Ralph Rowan a few days ago for the first time since I have been over here. We had some pictures taken together a few days ago and will send you some as soon as I get them. Well I guess I will have to close for this time,

With love to all  
 Iler



Ralph Rowan, *USS Brooklyn*, and Iler Owen Watson, Headquarters Co., 31st Infantry. See March 25, 1919, letter.

April 22, 1919

Dear Folks –

Will try to drop you a few lines this afternoon and let you know I am well and feeling fine and hope this will find everybody at home feeling the same only a little more cheerful. I recieved (sic) your letter of March 14th and was sorry to hear that you folks had the “flu”<sup>10</sup> and certainly hope you are all over it by this time, as I had it over here and know what it is, although I did not have it very bad.

Hows the weather over there now. I sapouse (sic) it is nice and bright by this time and everything green. The weather is on the “bum” over here it rains every week and it gets awful muddy and sloppy but most of the Companys [sic] have issued rubber boots to wade through it with. We are doing guard duty every other day now so you see it is not very pleasent (sic). But please dont think I am growling when I write this for I am not, it is what I expected when I enlisted. Most of the Canadians have left here now so maybe I might be able to get home by next Christmas at the most.

Well folks I dont know of anything more to write so will close for this time and hope to hear from you soon.

With love to all  
 Iler

<sup>10</sup> The 1918 Influenza Pandemic has been described as one of the greatest medical disasters in history, infecting about 500 million people worldwide and killing between 50 and 100 million.

Cpl Iler O Watson  
Headquarters Co. 31st Inf  
A.E.F. Siberia

Vladivostock  
Aug. 25, 1919

Dear Folks –

Will write you a few lines today and let you know that I am well and feeling fine and hope this will find you the same. How is everything at home these days, it has been so long since I received a letter from you folk that I dont know much about how things are progressing at home. I have received only one letter in six weeks. By the time you receive this I will probally (sic) and should be on my way home. One transport has arrived with troops to relieve the men over here, but of course I will have to wait my turn as they are takeing (sic) all the men with dependents back first and of course it will be no use to write to me for I would probably be in Frisco by the time it arrives. Well there is nothing new over here except an epedemick (sic) of cholera has broken out in this place and lots of people dying everyday. Well I guess I will close for this time

With love to all

Iler

#### Editor's Note

Most of the information on Camp Fremont and A.E.F. Siberia is from *Golden Gate to Golden Horn: Camp Fremont, California and American Expedition to Siberia of 1918* by William F. Strobridge in *La Peninsula*, October 1989. Additional information is from his research correspondence now in the Archives of the San Mateo County Historical Association.

#### Letter from Tipton, California

Tipton Cal  
Jan. 22 1920

Dear Folks –

Will drop you a few lines today and let you know where I am and that I am feeling fine and hope this will find you folks in the best of health. I was discharged on the 17th day of this month and was intending to surprise you folk by walking in on you but I have not written you for such a long time that I am almost ashamed to come home now. I am in a little town just below Tulare Cal. I came down with a friend of mine who was my Bunkie ever since I have been in the army. I intend to stay here a while and look things over here, wages seem to be better here than any place I have heard of besides there is plenty work going on here.

I think I will go to work here as soon as I visit you folks at home, if you folks will write as soon as you get this I will get it before I leave here which I think will be Monday the 26th

Will close for this time

With love to all

Iler

#### Conclusion

After his discharge, Iler Watson engaged in farming. He soon contracted tuberculosis, which the family attributed to his Siberian experience. He convalesced in Arizona at Fort Whipple and in Prescott, where treatment at this time included artificial pneumothorax, a surgical treatment to collapse the lung. He did not work again having never fully recovered his health. He married Miriam Wood on July 15, 1926, in Prescott. They soon moved to Denver, Colorado, where they built a home.

Remembering his wartime experiences, Watson collected photographs and books about A.E.F. Siberia which are now in the Archives of the San Mateo County Historical Association. Iler Watson died on May 1, 1974.



# Sketches from World War I:

## A Burlingame Soldier's Experience

Sketches by Alvin Page Colby



Alvin Page Colby, c. 1918.

### Introduction

Born July 12, 1893, Alvin Page Colby grew up in San Francisco. His parents, Fred and Clara, and his younger brother, Alfred, moved to Burlingame after the 1906 Earthquake. Alvin was known as “Big Al” and Alfred was called “Little Al,” even though the younger brother ended up being bigger. Alvin Colby worked at Wisnom Hardware in San Mateo.

In early 1917, prominent Masons in the San Francisco area planned to form an ambulance unit, with each member a Master Mason, to serve under

the sponsorship of the American Red Cross. After the United States declared war, the plan was revised to supply the Army with full complement of officers and men for an ambulance company. The Masonic Ambulance Corps was officially known as the 364<sup>th</sup> Ambulance Company, 316<sup>th</sup> Sanitary Train, 91<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division of the United States Army. The 91<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division was nicknamed the Wild West Division.

Colby trained with the division at Camp Lewis near Tacoma, Washington, from August 1917 to June 1918. He then embarked on the long journey to France to participate in World War I.

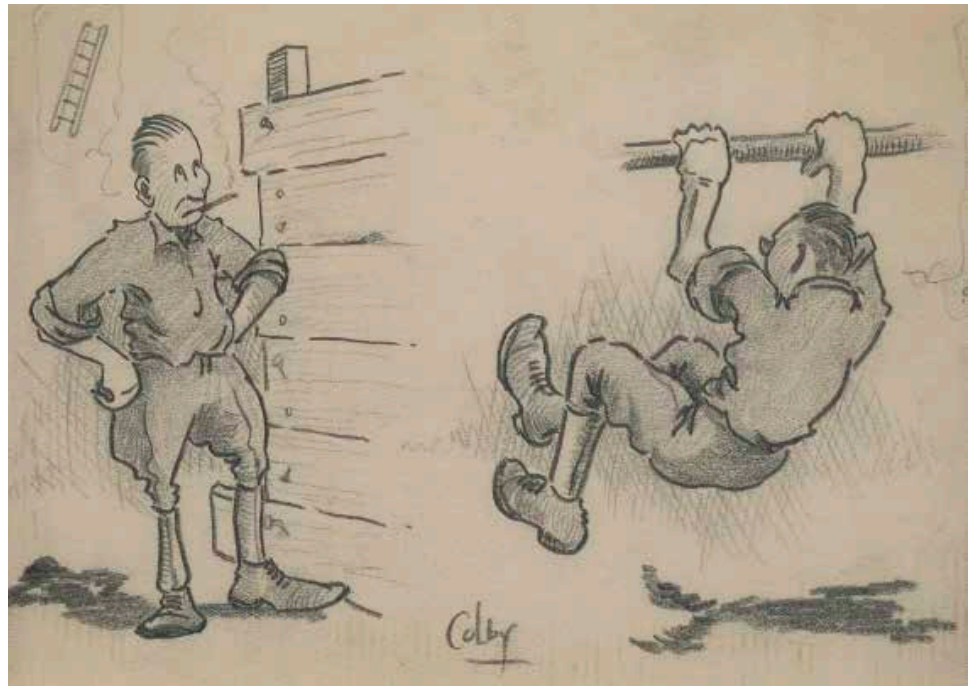
The division's first operation was in the St. Mihiel Offensive. In the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, it helped destroy the German First Guard Division while smashing through enemy lines. The division fought in Belgium in the Ypres-Lys battle during the final days of the war.

Colby served as a cook during the last year of the war, eventually reaching the rank of sergeant. He later told his family that he learned to cook French onion soup with “one sip of wine for the cook and one for the soup.”

Colby's letters home during the “Great War” often included comic sketches about daily life. These sketches were put in a scrapbook and saved by his family. In 2017, the family donated Colby's World War I sketches to the San Mateo County Historical Association.

The scrapbook includes 89 sketches. Colby used whatever paper was available to create both simple outlines and detailed drawings. He created both self-portraits and sketches of other soldiers. While Colby recorded the date and location on some of his work, potential dates of other sketches have been assigned based on histories of the Masonic Ambulance Corps and the published diary of one of its members.





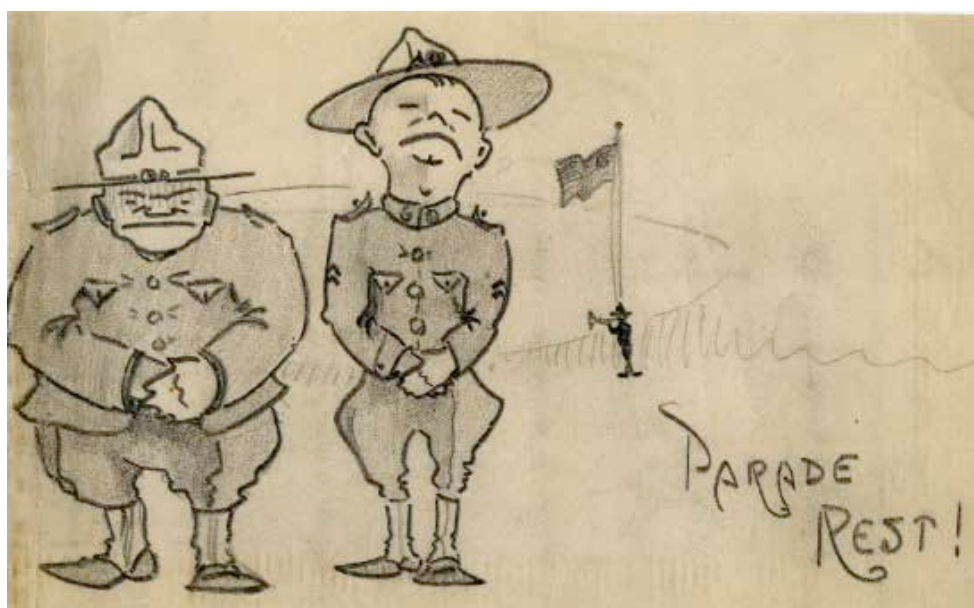
### Becoming a Soldier at Camp Lewis

On August 4, 1917, the Masonic Ambulance Corps assembled in front of San Francisco City Hall where the mayor presented the group with a large American flag.

Top left: The Company arrived at Camp Lewis on August 8, 1917. The new soldiers were issued tents, canvas cot, pack, blankets and gear for each man.

Bottom left: While lacking medical or hospital training when they arrived, the Company was part of the Medical Corps. They gave each man a smallpox vaccination, typhoid inoculation and paratyphoid inoculation.





#### Editor's Note

Colby's family donated memorabilia that he had collected after the war. The information on the the 364<sup>th</sup> Ambulance Company/Masonic Ambulance Corps and the 91<sup>st</sup> Division has been taken from three documents.

William W. Nielsen served as a private in the Masonic Ambulance Corps. His diary from July 11, 1918, to May 2, 1919, was later published privately by the group.

A short history of the Masonic Ambulance Corps was published in the program for the group's fiftieth anniversary on August 5, 1967.

Clayton Elliott wrote his memories in the article, "History of the Masonic Ambulance Corps" in the *Northern California Research Lodge*, a Masonic publication, in September 1970.

#### Becoming a Soldier at Camp Lewis

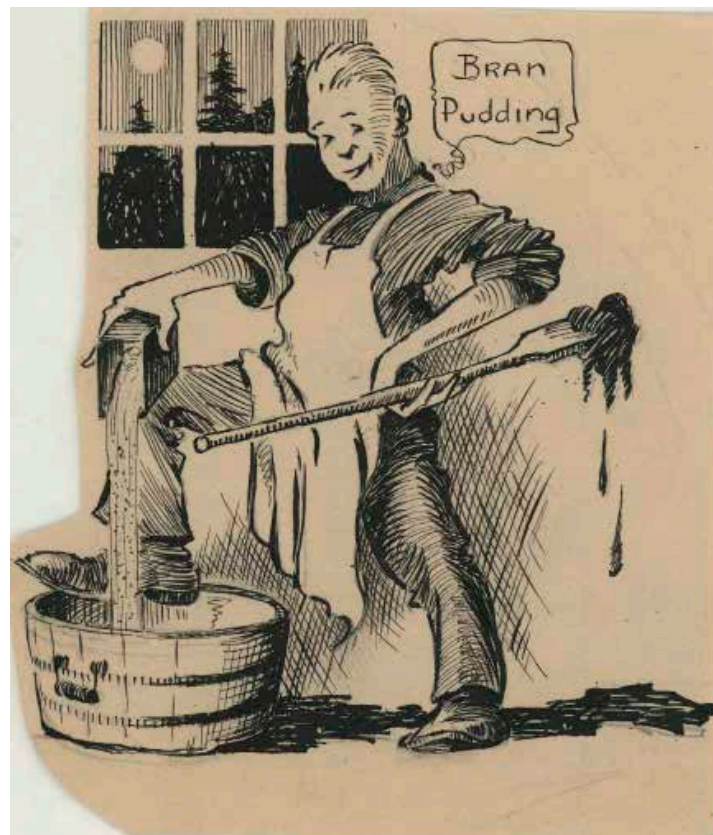
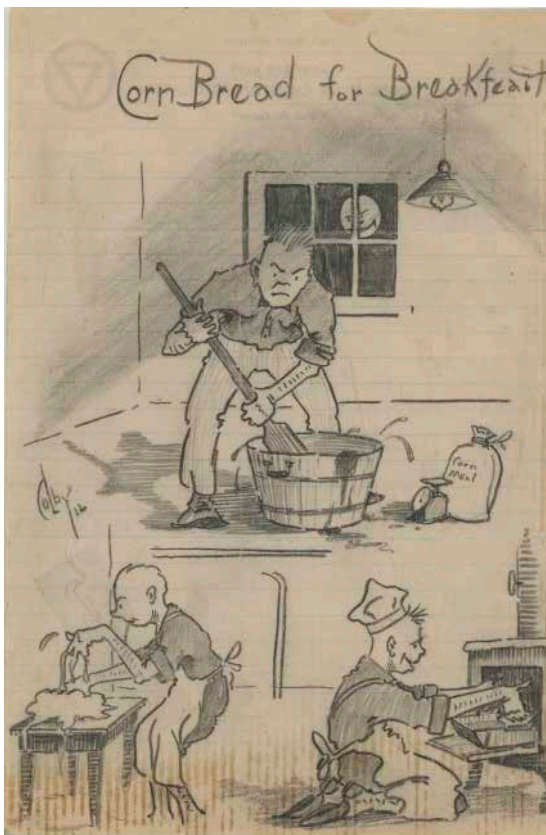
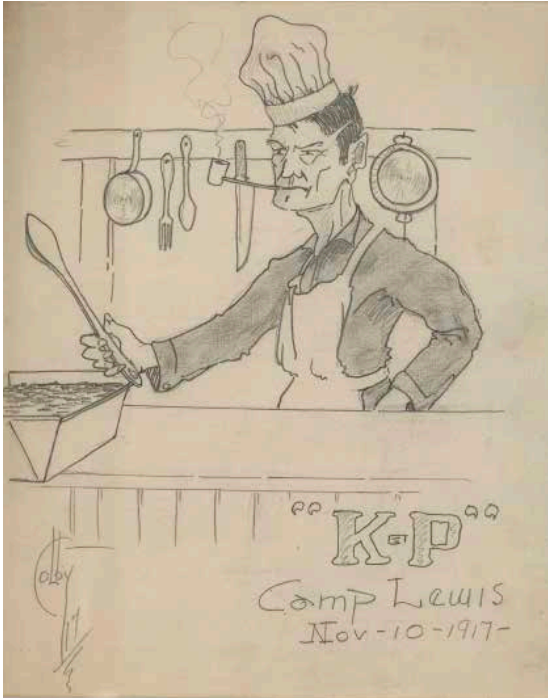
Top left: The new soldiers were introduced to the pup tents they would use in France. Also known as the shelter-half, each man would carry half of the two-person tent on the march. The tent did not have the flap doors of today's tents.

Bottom left: The 91<sup>st</sup> Division was called the "Pine Tree Division" for the green pine tree on the shoulder patch.





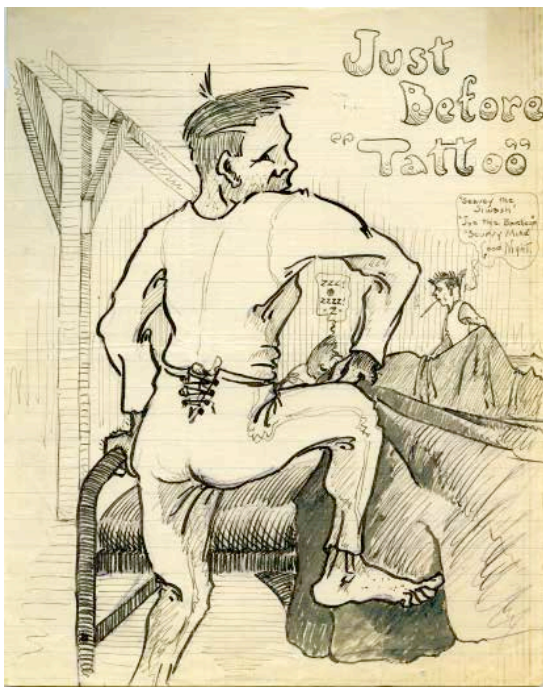




### On Duty at Camp Lewis

Members of the 364<sup>th</sup> Ambulance Company/Masonic Ambulance Corps trained as soldiers and performed medical duties such as assisting with inoculations. They also cleaned and guarded a portion of the camp. As a cook, Colby also spent time on Kitchen Police or Kitchen Patrol (K.P.).





### Off Duty at Camp Lewis

Top row: Mail from home was important to the soldiers. *Howard Got Mail* (top right) is drawn in a different style than Colby's other sketches.

Bottom left: Tattoo is the evening bugle call that signal all lights in the squad room to be extinguished and all loud talking to be discontinued within 15 minutes.

Bottom right: Bunk fatigue was slang for sleeping during the day.





### Off Duty Entertainment

In his history of the Masonic Ambulance Corps, Clayton Elliott noted, "Our company had much musical and other talent – some semi-professional, or better...We bought a piano for our large recreation room and put in a "PX" which made a lot of money for the company to use to augment our 'mess' fund. We put on entertainments and many men came to our PX from other companies."

Bottom right: While on leave, members of the Masonic Ambulance Corps would be entertained for one or two nights by members of the Masonic Lodges in nearby Tacoma.





### Arriving in France

The 364<sup>th</sup> Ambulance Company/Masonic Ambulance Corps left Camp Lewis on June 28, 1918. On July 12, they sailed from New York on the SS *Olympic*. After a short stop in England, the Company arrived in Cherbourg, France, on July 21. William Nielsen wrote in his diary, "Notice absence of men. Cars operated by women."

Top right: August 7, 1918, was the first pay day in France.

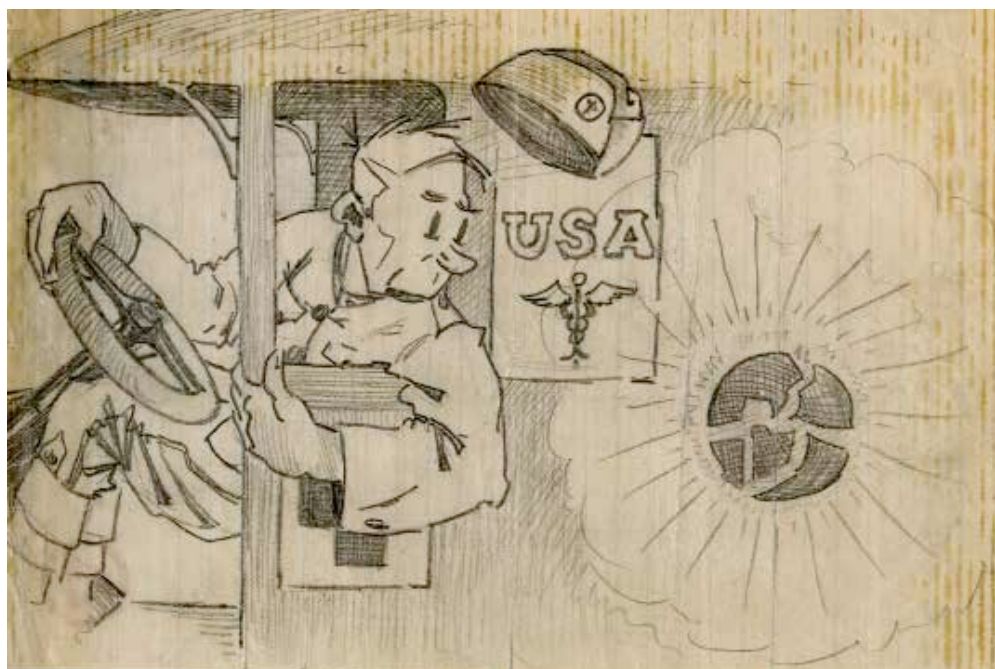
Bottom left: Many of Colby's sketches from Europe are signed "A.E.F." for American Expeditionary Forces. Under the command of General John J. Pershing, the A.E.F. fought alongside the French, British, Canadian and Australian armies on the Western Front. The M.D. in the signature might reflect that Sanitary Trains were part of the Medical Department.

Bottom right: Nielsen wrote in his diary on July 24, "Company still on guard. Heard a lot of comment on how efficient our guard was letting everybody pass through. Most of us had plenty 'vin rouge' or blaue."









## On the Front

The 91<sup>st</sup> Division participated in the St. Mihiel Offensive (September 10-24, 1918) and the Meuse-Argonne Offensive (September 16-October 3, 1918), earning battle stars in both offensives. On September 26, William Nielsen wrote:

Awakened during the night by sounds of terrific bombardment. Sound like all hell was turned loose. Troops going thru town all day on way to front...Took a hike up to French batteries with Bill Robb...Find shells coming too close to be safe so returned back to town. Shells followed me in very close. Kept on the run...Ask for volunteers on stretcher work at field hospital as the Wild West boys have gone over the top. Think I picked a bum detail but somebody has to do it.

Top right: On September 22, Nielsen wrote: "Some wonder if all shells going overhead are Fritzie's...All make scramble for tin hats and gas masks." "Frog" Wisnom is likely Samuel F. Wisnom, a member of the Masonic Ambulance Corps.



### On to Belgium

The 91<sup>st</sup> Division participated in the Ypres-Lys battle during the final days of the war, earning another battle star.

Top left: On October 17, William Nielsen noted that he got up early for hot cakes before getting on the train for Belgium. The Company arrived in Belgium on October 19.

Top right: Durham refers to Bull Durham Smoking Tobacco. Soldiers did not have the materials to roll cigarettes.

Bottom left: Nielsen wrote on October 21, "Rained last night as it has most of the time since arriving here. Introduced to Flanders mud."

Bottom right: On October 30, Nielsen recorded "Everything all right until we get to Oyghern where we stopped for night where Huns dropped bombs on us and we had to make run for turnip patch."





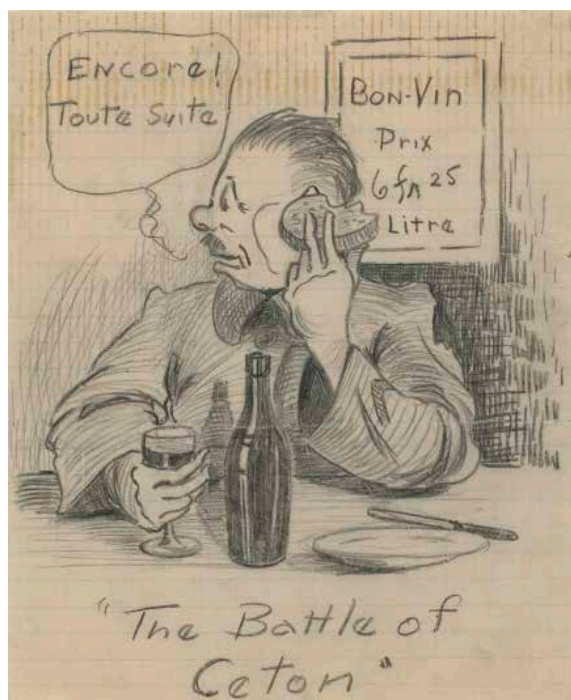
### On the Comedic Front

Top row: On October 28, William Nielsen wrote, "Cootie inspection. Laugh at Al and McCain. Find I have beau coups myself on my nice chamois skin vest. Hot bath at field hospital; sterilization of clothes." Nielsen makes several references in his diary to Al. It is unknown whether he is referring to Colby.

Bottom left: King Albert refers to the King of Belgium. On October 24, Nielsen recorded, "Went over to the trenches and got a few souvenirs from the Belgians." He made many references to getting souvenirs.

Bottom right: Nielsen noted on October 28, "Turn in early with Al after getting busted in crap game."





### Off Duty in France

Top left: In early 1919, the Company spent several months in Ceton, a village in northwestern France, while waiting transport home. In January 1919, William Nielsen wrote, "From now on we fought the battle of Ceton. Enemies are rum, shows, conyac, triple sec, etc."

Top right: In the note accompanying this sketch Colby wrote, "So, I didnt get time to write you this evening. Love, Al."

Bottom right: On January 13, 1919, California ratified the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment that prohibited the "manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors."



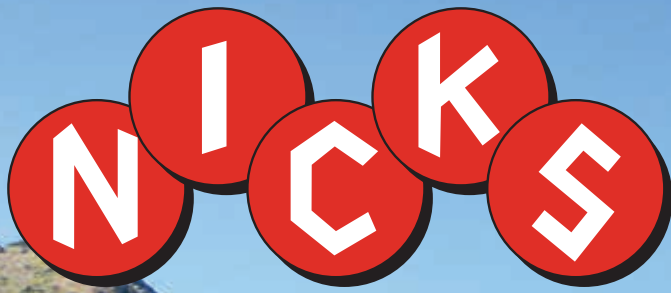


### Conclusion

The 364<sup>th</sup> Ambulance Company/Masonic Ambulance Corps left France on April 8, 1919. They were discharged on May 13, 1919, at the Presidio in San Francisco. Clayton Elliott wrote in his history of the Company, "We entered the war with every man and officer a Master Mason and we ended it that way."

After the war, Alvin Page Colby returned to Burlingame and to his job at Wisnom's Hardware. He married Hazel Adele Downing (sketch on left) in 1920 and had two daughters, Barbara and Nancy. Colby continued to pursue art in his spare time by making wooden furniture and wrought iron hinges. He drew sketches for his daughters' high school yearbooks and made Easter bonnets created from actual hardware sold at Wisnom's Hardware. During World War II, he served in the San Mateo County Ground Observer Corps. Alvin Page Colby died in 1975.





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## Peninsula at War!

San Mateo County's World War II Legacy



Discover *Peninsula at War! San Mateo County's World War II Legacy*, on exhibit at the San Mateo County History Museum (December 7, 2016 - February 4, 2019). Through artifacts, images and oral histories, the exhibit explores the contributions of local service people and highlights home front activities.

## Noah's Ark:

San Mateo's Historic Restaurant



Noah Williams' restaurant, Noah's Ark, was a popular San Mateo destination in the late 1920s. See images and artwork from the business in *Noah's Ark: San Mateo's Historic Restaurant*, on exhibit at the San Mateo County History Museum Rotunda (January 23 - April 15, 2018).

## Dr. Stanger Legacy Society



Dr. Stanger at Millbrae excavation site, 1944.

Dr. Frank Stanger was the first executive director of the San Mateo County Historical Association. Among his accomplishments, he opened the organization's first museum and started La Peninsula.

Many of our supporters have joined the Dr. Stanger Legacy Society by including the Association in their wills or trusts. Their gifts, and yours should you choose to join them, help us preserve and interpret the history of San Mateo County.

Members of the Dr. Stanger Legacy Society receive invitations to annual events. For more information, please contact Kaia Eakin at 650.299.0104.



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