

James M. Miller
Forward Artillery Observer: Hazardous Duty!
314th Artillery
80th Division
American Expeditionary Force
World War I

by his son, **Myron M. Miller**
March 2010

This is the story of my father's experience in World War I, kept silent for many years in letters in a box that the family had kept for many years, then passed on to me at his death in 1965. Dad talked to me only once in his lifetime about his experiences in World War I, an afternoon in Evanston in the fall of 1952 when he visited me for a dad's weekend at my fraternity at Northwestern. I have pretty good recall of that discussion, and had that amplified when I finally opened the box and read – or re-read – the letters he wrote before and during World War I.

Was he a hero? I think so, and you'll see why. He was “just a private”, but performed a role that put him in one of the most vulnerable positions in the military, a forward artillery observer, one who with a team of two officer and two enlisted men go to the enemy lines, or behind enemy lines to direct the firing of the artillery against enemy installations. A newspaper article in his hometown of Hartstown, Crawford County, Pennsylvania defined his role as “map maker and range finder” for his regiment – that's a forward artillery observer. But let's go back and see what led Jim Miller to have the honor of that responsibility.

Who was Jim Miller?

Jim Miller was born in November 1893 and was raised in the small community of Hartstown, Crawford County, Pennsylvania. His parents had been born and raised in that little town. His father was the postmaster, and a harness maker and tanner. The post office and his shop were in a separate building on the corner of their lot. Everyone in that town visited the Miller shop or residence every weekday as they came to pick up their mail. The men tarried a bit by the pot-belly stove in the post office before getting on with their crafts, or the women would pick up the mail and tarry a minute to see my grandmother in her kitchen, warmed by a huge wood-burning stove, before returning to take care of their many chores.

Dad graduated from Conneaut Lake High School, in Conneaut Lake, Pennsylvania in 1912. Shortly thereafter he went to live in the Pittsburgh area, attracted somewhat, I'm sure, by the fact that his uncle Milo H. Miller was an educator in the Pittsburgh area.

Carnegie Institute of Technology (today Carnegie-Mellon) 1912-1917

From what I have learned from his correspondence, it is likely that he soon went to work for the Main Electric Manufacturing Company, manufacturer of electric lighting and power plants. Its principal office was located at 500-520 Aiken Avenue and Pennsylvania Railroad (for those familiar with the geography of Pittsburgh). He rented a room nearby in Knoxville, close to where his uncle and aunt lived.



Jim Miller (on right) with roommate Ed Morgan at their rooming house in Knoxville (Pittsburgh) in 1914

While he worked during the days at Main Electric, he began night school at Carnegie Tech in the fall of 1912 and spent five years being trained as an electrical engineer in the School of Applied Science. He received his diploma (not yet a Bachelor of Science degree) at the tenth commencement of the Carnegie Institute of Technology on June 15, 1917 at a ceremony at the Carnegie Music Hall in Pittsburgh. Dad told me that his semester tuition was just \$18, thanks to the support provided at this institute by its founder, Andrew Carnegie! As it turned out, his education at Carnegie Tech was to have a critical role in what he was eventually to do when he joined the U.S. Army in World War I.

After graduation, he went to work full time for the Main Electric Company in Pittsburgh. He started back at Carnegie Tech to take more courses, continuing his work toward eventually getting a Bachelor's Degree, which he eventually received at that university in 1932, by attending night school from 1929 until 1932. He took nine hours of classes a week: two hours of thermodynamics on Monday evening, three hours of electric chemistry on Tuesday; one hour of hydraulics and two of machine design on Thursday and one hour of hydraulics on Friday. All of this schooling was to be to his

benefit in the months to come when he finally joined the army.

The tone of his letters

Dad was a rather prolific letter writer during the period before he was drafted, during his service period and during his final months while recovering in hospitals in Orleans, France and Lakewood, New Jersey. Note the tone of his letters to various family members. When he wrote to his parents, he was careful not to worry them, telling them that he was doing fine. To his Uncle Milo (Milo H. Miller) and his brother Mark (Samuel Marcus Miller), he was pretty candid and more informative. When writing to his cousin Florence Miller (later Willison), he emphasized the softer side of his experiences, particularly in describing the beauty of France.

The big decision: go for a commission or be drafted – Letter of October 17, 1917

In a letter to his father in October 1917, he laid out his options and his thoughts about the alternatives. By contrast with what he eventually did in the service, he wasn't too eager to go, or at least to get in the best possible circumstances:

“... Have found that there are only about 70 men ahead of me on the list in this district [for the draft]. On the other draft only one man out of five was taken in the district [Division No. 8 of the City of Pittsburgh]. There were so many foreigners and married men in the district. Now at that rate if they needed 20 more men from this district I would have to go. There is not a chance of me getting off on industrial claim as the army are not using any of our stuff.

Now there is still a chance for me to put in my application for a commission in the engineer officers reserve corps and I would much rather go as a second lieutenant in the engineers than go as a private in the drafted army.

The pay is \$147 a month instead of \$33 and I think you would rather know I was an officer than a private. Besides, I doubt if I could stand the routine and monotony of a private's life [Just wait!]

In the engineers I stand a big chance of being assigned to industrial work a way back of the lines in France and might never get clear into the scrap.

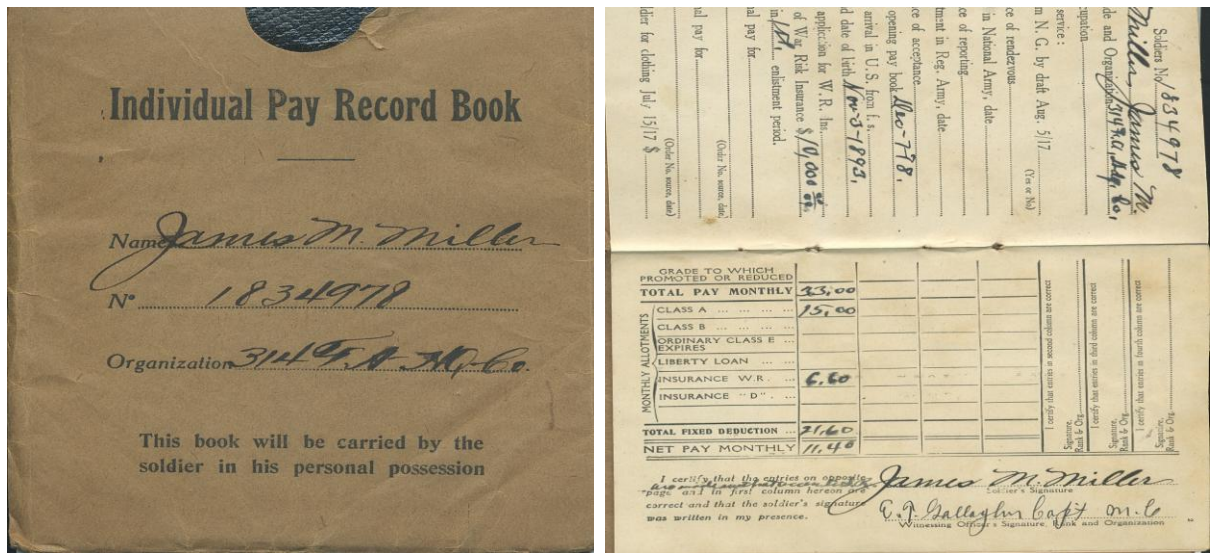
Considering his desire to avoid being a private, and also that he wanted to get an assignment as an officer in an engineering regiment that would let him be far from the action, it is almost amusing to see where he ended up! This was not necessarily a hero in the making, but wait...!

Drafted!

I'll never know how his father responded, nor what happened during the next few months after he wrote that letter on October 17, 1917. The next record I have shows that the draft board in Pittsburgh notified him on February 4, 1918 (Exhibit I), that he had passed his physical examination and that put him in Class 1, "subject to call in your order of call when the Government may have need of your services."

On that same date, he was notified by his "Order of Induction into Military Service of the United States" by order number 1093, serial number 1119, that he was to report to the local board at Old City Hall, Smithfield Street in Pittsburgh at 10 a.m. on the 12th of February, 1918 for military duty (Exhibit II). So much for all the deliberation about applying to become an officer!

Yes, the salary was \$33 per month, far short of the \$147 a month that he hoped he might get if he were to have been commissioned! Here is the proof:



Cover of Dad's military pay record

Inside of pay record, showing \$33/month

Departure from Pittsburgh

Dad's Uncle Milo, my great-uncle, was a renaissance man in many ways. This will provide a flavor of his great descriptive abilities and his sensitivities. Milo, always the dedicated man in supporting his family, went to the train station in Pittsburgh to see Dad depart for Petersburg, Virginia. Here is his description:

Letter from Uncle Milo H. Miller to his brother Myron Manson Miller, February 18, 1918

Dear Brother Myron,

"I have delayed writing until James was off, thinking that you would be anxious to learn

about his send off (*which was from Pittsburgh; Myron lived in Hartstown, Crawford County, Pennsylvania, about 100 miles away from Pittsburgh*).

He finally got started at 4:30 this afternoon in the midst of a heavy downpour of rain. If there is anything in the old saying that a good beginning makes a bad ending, surely the reverse must be necessarily true. His start was not very auspicious from the standpoint of the weather. They had a band for his contingent, and marched them around the square to the B&O (*Baltimore and Ohio*) Depot. Marcus (*Jame's brother*) and Florence (*Dad's cousin*) and I had gone on ahead, so as to be there when they should arrive.

The train consisted of ten day coaches, and it was stationed on a side track several squares from the Depot. There was a broad stretch of pavement alongside for the crowd to stand and see them board the train. This was lined with people, relatives and friends. Shortly after we reached the place for entertaining, we heard the band coming, and about the same time it began to rain. There was a rush for shelter and soon every coach was crowded to the very platforms, and yet hundreds of people had to stand up and take it. We found James in the crush just as he was going up the steps and just had a few moments to say a word and bid him goodbye, then wave to him as he stood on the platform before he left.

It was not a very satisfactory send-off, but it was all anybody got under the circumstances. We were soaked in a few minutes...As soon as he was gone we made haste to get away, but the shower was over as soon as it had begun.

I am not going to tell you how much we all regret to see James go away, for that will only tend to make you feel bad. And you feel bad enough about it already. He acted like a man going to war should act – kept up his courage throughout, and made the best of everything. I really think he wanted to go and help lick the Kaiser. He felt sober and thoughtful, but never swerved from what he considered his duty. I really think that he will make a good soldier.

My only regret is that he did not enlist earlier in the war and go into the Engineering Corps. That is where he belongs, and that is where I hope they will place him yet. He made an effort yesterday to get into a new corps that is just organizing, but they would not take him on such short notice. They said it would take at least a week to arrange for his transfer, and that his chances were just as good for a transfer after he was in camp. I feel sure that they will soon found out his special fitness for the work and place him where he can do the most good. Anyway, he is off and the worst is over. I think the leave-taking is the hardest battle he will have to fight.

The Main boys (*who owned the electrical distributorship where Dad worked during the days, while he attended Carnegie Tech at night*) were very good to him. They are mighty fine boys and they were sorry to lose him. They gave him a wrist watch and a signet ring with his name and date engraved. I did not see the ring, but the watch was beautiful. There is not much else to write about nor think about tonight but James's departure. It is uppermost in all our minds at present. He did the only thing for him to do, and he did it without flinching. The next issue of the "War Service Union" will

contain his name among the Knoxville (*suburb of Pittsburgh*) boys who have gone to the front. ...”

News from Camp Lee, Petersburg, Virginia

After being drafted and leaving Pittsburgh, we first hear about his travels from his Uncle Milo, and the feelings that Milo had about Dad going off to war.

February 21, 1918

Dear Brother Myron,

“I had a nice letter from James on Tuesday evening. He says they were nearly thirty hours on the way to camp, with no chance to sleep. He had been doing clerical work all day, writing and assorting papers. I hope they will give him a clerical position and keep him on this side of the water. We have a neighbor, whose son has recently been placed in charge of an office as assistant to some officer....

Tomorrow is your birthday. I wish you joy and contentment of mind. There cannot be much happiness in your home when the boys are both away, but you have the assurance that you have contributed your best to the service of our country, and can only hope and pray that all will be well. We are all being borne on by an irresistible power, and no one knows how it will end. We only know that it will end some day, and we must do our best to make it end right.

We cannot do much at best, but we can do our duty and let Providence take care of the results. This is slight consolation, I know, but way what we may we cannot change the issue, but must wait and see it out. I did not want to get into this war, but now that we are in, I want to see it through. Perhaps it is better to fight it out now than some time in the future. It seems as if the Kaiser had made up his mind for world domination. If so, there could be no compromise with such an aristocrat..

Have you heard from Malcolm? He must be on the way or “over there.” Harold Ellis (cousin) was also about ready to start when we heard from him last...

Milo”

The next word we have from Dad is a letter he wrote to his hometown paper, the Knoxville War Service Union, Knoxville, Pennsylvania dated March 10, 1918. He addressed the letter from the Supply Company, 314th Field Artillery, Camp Lee, Petersburg, Virginia. In that letter to the paper, he said:

“...Was pleasantly surprised when I received your letter of recent date enclosing the two Smileage Books. (?) They are certainly appreciated and will be the means of furnishing me many evenings of enjoyment. We have a fine Liberty Theater and have been furnished some of the best and latest plays. I

have been in the service now for about one month and already have commenced to feel the benefits of the systematic living (!). I am nicely located among congenial companions and under a fine officer personnel. We have plenty of good, substantial food, well cooked and seasoned. I receive my full equipment three days after being transferred to this company..”

Dad was assigned to the Supply Company of the 314th Field Artillery at Camp Lee. According to the history of the 314th, Dad arrived there on February 20, 1918.

First hint that he might be destined for some important work - May 22, 1918

“Sunday I was called down to the Colonel's office about my transfer. A general order prohibits the use of outside influence to secure transfers and so I had not made application, knowing I would hear about it soon enough.

I rather expected a reprimand, but when I assured him that the different Congressmen were called into it without my knowledge, he was very nice. Had a fine talk with him and he said he could transfer me to the Headquarters Company of this regiment on surveying and range finding work.

I left it up to him and he said to stay in the Supply Company for the present and do my best and he would remember me (which apparently he did).”

It isn't clear who was interceding in Dad's behalf, but obviously someone back in Pennsylvania was trying to help Dad by getting him a position that would use his education and experience.

Departure for France – May 26, 1918

His unit boarded the SS. America at 8:10 on the morning of May 26 and left shore at 12:10 p.m. The trip across the Atlantic took a bit longer than usual because of the need for the ship to zig zag to avoid German submarines. The ship took its course from the famous German ship Baron von Steuben, which was armed almost as heavily as a battleship. The America was armed with two three-inch guns, one forward and one aft, and were manned by crack gun crews from the Royal Italian Navy.

They arrived at Brest in France on June 8, 1918. His father received the postcard on June 18, 1918, announcing his being safely in France. The regiment was marched immediately to Pontanezen Barracks, a rest camp outside of Brest. After three days rest, they took a twelve hour train ride to the town of Redon, in Brittany. The troops went through some serious training during the days in Redon, including training in the use of gas respirators (gas masks). The masks were to be worn for an hour each day while performing ordinary duties. Dad was assigned – at some point – to be the one in his unit to test for gas in the event of a possible attack.

Fortunately for the men of the 314th, they had time in the evenings to enjoy the town of Redon and its people. For example, there was a band concert every evening in the public square by either the 313th, 314th or 315th Regimental bands, and the troops were able to mingle with the local people, who came out in droves for those concerts.



The 314th Field Artillery Regimental Band

On Sundays, the men would take walks out in the country or along the banks of the beautiful canal that ran through Redon.

Impressions of France

Before moving on to the military action, just a pause to reflect on what Dad thought about the first country outside of the United States he had ever visited, albeit in rather dire circumstances! Here is a sample of his letters.

June 15, 1918 Somewhere in France to his father in Hartstown, Pennsylvania

“...This is a very interesting country and I hope that we will get a chance to stay here a while after the censorship is removed, so I can write of the things I see – as I know I can never remember all that is of interest.”

Of course you know that this country is very densely populated as compared to the United States, but when one gets used to it he begins to find it very beautiful. I don't blame the French for putting up such a stubborn fight to save it from the Huns. The people here are very hospitable and will do almost anything to make us feel welcome and comfortable.”

June 17, 1918 Somewhere in France - letter to his uncle, Milo H. Miller

“.. We are now located for a short time, at least, in a comfortable quarter and among most hospitable people. They spare themselves no pains to make us comfortable and feel at home.”

We find some of their customs queer to us but get along fine with them and are already beginning to pick up a word now and then and I think we will all be able to speak considerable French before long.

...This country appeals very strongly to me and I consider it beautiful. ..”

July 4, 1918 On active service with the American Expeditionary Forces – letter to his mother

“... A year ago today I watched a big parade of the registered men and all the military organizations in Pittsburgh. Today I marched in a parade and a year from today I expect to march with the Veterans of Foreign Wars back in Pittsburgh.

The French people are all celebrating with us today. I think every house has the Stars and Stripes and the Tri Color flying together.

I am still in love with this country and like it better every day. Lately I have been a helper on a motor truck, hauling supplies and have had several nice trips cross country. Have seen some beautiful little towns and some chateaus that are up to the descriptions I have seen of them.”

July 9, 1918 (no location indicated) letter to his cousin, Florence Miller (who later married Russell Willison)

“...Am still feeling fine and as enthusiastic as ever over this country and the people. Have had several days as a helper on a big auto truck carrying supplies cross country and so have seen considerable of the countryside. The manners and customs of the people, particularly in the rural districts are a great deal different than ours.

I was much surprised to find the old windmill, of the Don Quixote fame, in general use throughout the country. Have also passed several fine old chateaus which in every way came up to the descriptions of them I have read back in civil life. I only wish I could tell more definitively of some of the places I have been and the trips I have made. I am heartbroken that we are not allowed to take any photographs. It would be an almost priceless collection after the war..”

I add a few words and phrases to my vocabulary of French from time to time and believe before long I will be able to make known my wants in a fairly clear way. I have made the acquaintance of a young fellow who has had English in school and we have some interesting talks together. He has a little brother about four years old and it is very funny to hear him talk. He is just at the age when he is picking up all sorts of new words and the boys delight in teaching him English with a good bit of slang thrown in.

On the fourth all the troops stationed here were on parade in the morning..."

Dad spoke to our family only briefly about France, but we knew from our mother that Dad really wanted to be able to go back for a good vacation to see the country during peacetime. Unfortunately, Dad never made it, but I have been able, starting in 1970 to spend considerable time in various parts of the country that Dad came to love, as I have.

A dramatic change in Dad's status

It was during the 314th's stay in Redon that Dad's assignment changed dramatically.

Bad news, but also some very good news – July 13, 1918 - “On active duty with the American Expeditionary Force.”

In a letter to his brother Mark (Samuel Marcus Miller), he says:

“...we have a nasty job over here to finish up and we are all determined to do it in the shortest time, knowing that we can then go back perfectly content and with the knowledge that our country is safe from the horrors this one has been subjected to. This is proving a wonderful experience for all of us and I regret more each day that I cannot take off of you with me from week to week as we get more acquainted with the people and country..”

Then the bad news:

“...Have put in a rather painful week with a badly sprained back, contracted from falling with a large bag of oats on my back. As you know, a sprain is a slow thing to heal but I am taking the rest cure and gradually coming back into shape...” (then the lead in to the “good news”) I also have the extreme satisfaction of knowing that from now on my work will be of a vastly different nature (from his work in the supply company)..”

And now the exciting and dramatic news:

“...This morning Captain Ober ordered me to report to Capt. Hartwell of Headquarters Company for an interview and there I was practically told that I would be transferred to take up wireless work. However, about three hours later the Commanding Officer (Colonel Robert S. Welsh) sent for me and after quite a talk told me that he was putting me on a job which he considered the greatest opportunity for making good that he had ever had to offer to any of his men.

One other man from the regiment and two officers are all that are to take up the work and it is so far ahead of anything that I had hoped for that I am simply wild with delight (!!). I suppose you will let Uncle Milo (his uncle in

Knoxville, Pennsylvania) read this and I want him to know that his efforts have certainly had some effect and are deeply appreciated by me.

Perhaps later I can tell you more about the work I am going on but for the present can only say that it is most interesting and of the highest importance and is also something I can make good on..."

Dad didn't then describe the exact role he would play, but that information would come out in the following months. On that same date, July 13, 1918, this memorandum (Exhibit III) was sent from Headquarters 314th Field Artillery, A.P.O. 701, American E.F., France:

From: Colonel Robert S. Welsh, 314th Field Artillery

To: Hon. Guy E. Campbell, M.C., House of Representatives, Washington, D.C.

Subject: Transfer of Private James M. Miller

- 1. Your letter of June 5th 1918 has just reached me and I am pleased to advise you that I have already recommended Private Miller for a position which is vastly more desirable and important than the transfer you sought for him. It will require his educational and technical knowledge to the limit. I have talked with him and he is more than delighted and promises to prove all that has been said for him. He will no doubt write to his friends of his detail.**
- 2. You can be sure that none are more intensely interested in the welfare of the enlisted men than their officers.**
- 3. I thank you for your kindly interest.**



**Robert E. Welsh
Colonel 314th Field Artillery,
Commanding**

Sadly, Colonel Welsh, after courageously and effectively leading the 314th for much of the Meuse-Argonne battle, was killed on November 8, 1918. He certainly had a very instrumental role in taking my father from a somewhat ordinary role (if there is such a

thing) in the Supply Company to a very distinctive and dangerous role as a forward artillery observer.

This very important position was to be that of a forward artillery observer. According to Wikipedia:

“An artillery observer is a soldier responsible for directing artillery fire and close air support (after WWI) – ground attack by aircraft – onto enemy positions. Because artillery is an indirect-fire weapon system, the guns are rarely in line-of-sight of their target, often located tens of miles away. The observer serves as the eye of the artillery battery, calling in target locations and adjustments to the Fire Direction Center (FDC) via radio or (less commonly) landline. The FDC then translates the observer's order into firing solutions for the battery's cannons. Artillery observers are often deployed with combat arms maneuver units, typically infantry companies or armored squadrons.

Artillery observers are considered high-priority targets by enemy forces, as they control a great amount of firepower, are within visual range of the enemy, and are often located deep within enemy territory. The artillery observer must therefore be skilled not only in fire direction, but also in stealth and, if necessary, in direct combat.”

So now Dad had a very different and interesting – and dangerous – assignment. From his hesitation to be close to combat before he went into the service in 1917, we now find him eager to undertake an assignment that would put him right in the very front of combat operations. That's what comes from entering into the armed services for our country and realizing the importance of what one's contribution might mean to our country. It's an attitude adjustment that happened to me when I joined the U.S. Army in January 1956 to serve my country for two years.

“Somewhere in France” – August 1, 1918 (now Headquarters Company)

The “somewhere in France,” as I've indicated earlier, was near the town of Radon. In his letter of August 1, he says that they stayed only four days near where they landed (Brest). From his letter:

“...Was not much of a rest though, as we were in tents on dusty ground and water was very scarce. We have had a chance to get everything washed up and have a good chance to bathe where we are now. Plenty of good cold drinking water and good clean billets to sleep in. I can sleep anyplace now, though.

Not long ago when I was working on the motor truck I slept on the ground under the stars wrapped in my blankets and never slept sounder or woke up feeling better in my life. We have plenty of good food, no spoiled stuff and while not as great a variety as we had in camp, we have no kick coming at all. We have a YMCA tent here now and can buy cakes, chewing gum, jam and about once a week candy. We all think the YMCA one of the greatest things

connected with the Army...”

He was not always quite as enthusiastic about the YMCA, based on some comments later in his letters.

Travel across France, toward battle

It is interesting to have a sense of what the soldiers experienced as they worked their way across France toward what was to be a decisive battle. The letter above provides a bit of that flavor, and here is more:

August 1, 1918 Somewhere in France – letter to his brother (Samuel Marcus “Mark” Miller), sister (Mark's wife Violet Adsit) and Kenneth (Dad's nephew, son of Mark and Violet)

“... You see my pay as 1st Class Private with the overseas bonus amounts to \$36.60. Less \$6.60 insurance and \$6 allotment leave me even \$24 or 136 francs, 80 centimes.

Am going to tell you that I am billeted now over the coach house of a fine old French chateau and take a chance of it going through the censor. The building is stone and we are well protected from the weather. Have a good bed on my bad sack full of hay and our grub is good – wholesome, substantial food. Nothing stale or spoiled and while not a great variety you never saw a finer looking husky looking bunch of fellows so we know we are getting the right stuff to keep us in shape. Overseas rations calls for 20 ounces of meat a day, so you can see we are far from being starved. ..(More details about the food in Dad's letter to Uncle Milo (Milo H. Miller) in his letter of August 5, 1918).”

August 5, 1918 (no location cited) - letter to his uncle, Milo H. Miller

..(In this letter, he describes how his education at Carnegie Tech enabled him to move to an assignment on “the instruments” - his training to be a forward artillery observer).

“...We are now billeted in the upstairs of a Count's carriage houe. It is quite clean and a good substantial stone building. He is reputed to be worth 5,000,000 francs and lives in a fine old chateau with magnificent grounds. Acres of green grass and giant shade trees. We have the use of the grounds and hold all our classes under the trees in some corner of the grounds...”

August 14, 1918 (no location indicated) – letter to his brother Mark

.. We are now in a regular training camp. How long we will be here or where we go from here we of course do not know. We have dandy wooden barracks, cement latrines, bath-houses, and wash rooms. A big Y.M.C.A and branches located here...

September 2, 1918 Camp Meucon - letter to his father

“...If you want to find this place on the map, look in the western part of France in the province of Brittany or Bretagne as the French call it. While on the truck at Redon we made trips to St. Nazarre and Nantes passing thru several smaller towns, so I have seen almost all the towns of any size in this corner of France. Will name them all for you when I get back. I had a pass out of camp today and spent the afternoon in the city of Vannes, some post cards of which I am sending you. They have some very beautiful buildings in all these towns and also some very old ones. Nantes comes the nearest being a regular town of any (size).”

Preparing for his work – September 8, 1918 Headquarters Company

The next location we have for Dad in France is at Camp de Meucon near the city of Vannes. His unit left Radon in early August. That camp had a large artillery range and would accommodate several brigades at a time. On Sundays, passes were given for Vannes and many of the men took advantage of them. Trains ran every hour to and from camp. From the collection of post cards featuring Vannes, I know that Dad would have spent some time in Vannes. From Vannes, the 314th left for the front on September 12, and arrived at Longville, near Bar-de-Lus, by marching at night and camping by day.

He is finally able to say something of what he is preparing for (this from a letter to his uncle, Milo H. Miller):

“...I am still in school here cramming my head full of such things as y-azimuths, declinations, aiming points, dead spaces, visible areas, etc., etc. Of course I can't tell you much of what I am learning but it all pertains to locating and directing fire of the guns (the famous French 75) and French maps to work from. We have to learn to use the metric system entirely.

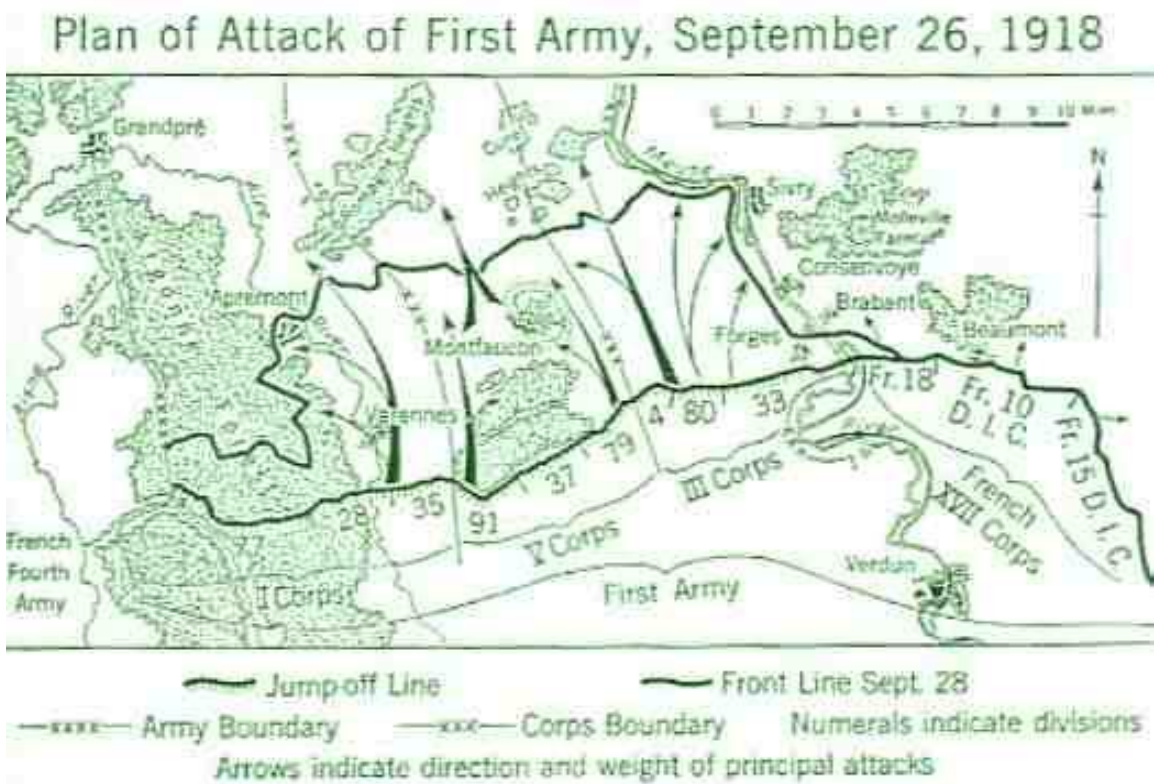
The work is very interesting, though, and I enjoy working hard at it. I hope when we get to the front to be able to turn in my data so correct that not a single one of our shells will be wasted. After seeing what one of our shell does when it lands, I hope at the rate of 200,000 a month and gradually working onto the front, the German's situation is hopeless and I think he realizes it, but it prolonging the scrap out of pure meanness.

I think that the overdue rainy season has finally arrived. It rains almost continually and the dust we have complained about is now nice slippery, sticky mud. Nights are very cold now and we pile on all the blankets we have. I manage to make out alright though and so far have escaped without a cold. Can sleep anyplace on anything and eat like a harvest hand...”

The major Allied offensive – the Battle of Argonne Forest – September 26, 1918

There is no letter from Dad about that very important day, the beginning of a major allied offensive. From the one day when Dad described his wartime experiences with me, he told me that he had been involved in his role as forward artillery observer at the time that that offensive began. He said that when the offensive began, artillery was placed “wheel to wheel” for 25 miles, and that they are commenced firing at the same time, and that “you can never imagine the sound of 25 miles of cannons going off at the same time!”

From another source, I learned that 2,700 guns (cannons) were employed in the beginning of the offensive on September 26, so Dad's statement about 25 miles of guns “wheel to wheel” was likely close to the truth. This was the location at the beginning of that offensive



He would later describe those days in an interview with his hometown newspaper, as follows:

“...He tells a very interesting story of his work of his regiment in the Argonne fight. The first placement of the guns was on “Dead Man's Hill” north of Verdun, and the second on Hill 281, which was no less famous in the magnificent defense made by the French when the latter resolved the hated Hun “should not pass.”...

He speaks in the highest terms of the work of his division, the 80th (see the location of the 80th on the map above), in the Argonne Forest. Their battery (the 314th Field Artillery) laid down one of the most perfect barrages for the 319th and 320th regiments when they went into action on the morning of the 26th of September and they kept up the good work until the armistice was signed.

By that time they had driven the Germans back to the Meuse at Sedan, and the boastful Prussians were completely cut off from their base supplies about Metz..”

Here is a photo of the “famous” French 75, the heart of the artillery used by the 314th Field Artillery:

314th Field Artillery, U.S. Army, France 1918
French 75 (see Exhibit IV)



In the thick of it – letter to his parents on October 5, 1918

In this letter, he describes what he has been experiencing:

“...Our division has been on the front for some few days and has had wonderful success. We have done everything asked of us. Have taken many prisoners and quantities of ammunition and material of all sorts. I don't mind confessing that there has been a time or two when I was pretty badly shaken but at present we are comparatively safe and are not almost due for a good long rest. Casualties in our regiment have been light. Have seen some stirring air battles; two or three almost every day. Yesterday we sw three Hun planes downed by Americans in less that two hours...”

In one system of trenches we recently took we found numbers of deep dugouts which we occupied until we advanced again. The Dutch had sure been taken by surprise as wew found incoming mail, in several dugouts, which had never been opened.”

Dad didn't convey some of the harrowing tales to his parents. In a letter from France in March 1919, from one of Dad's cousins to my grandparents, he made this statement:

“...Well, I should say James had some narrow escapes when the shrapnel took the sand off his helmet. But it is all over now and I'll bet he would not take a great deal for his experience.”

It's not surprising that Dad didn't share that information with his parents!

To give a sense of the conditions and location at that time, this is what he said in his letter:

“...We are getting enough to eat and are as comfortable as could be expected under these conditions. Dad wanted the pronunciations of two or three French names. As near as I can know these are correct:

Soisson – Swah'son

Foch – Fock (with a long O)

St. Michel – San Meheel

Although I don't have copies of the interchange of letters leading up to those explanations of the town, I infer that Dad was located at, or passing through, those towns/cities in France.

In the midst of battle, Dad commented again on the beautiful French countryside:

“...We passed through some very beautiful countryside recently. Great

fertile valleys and green hills dotted with quaint old red-tiled-roofed villages and farm houses. All the streams and roads were bordered with tall Lombardy poplars as shown in pictures of French landscapes...”

Dad always wanted to go back to France in later years to visit that beautiful countryside, but never made it. (I have been fortunate to have made quite a few trips to France and have had the pleasure to see that beautiful countryside and thought of him as I made those trips).

At the front – letter of October 15, 1918 to “Folks at home”

Dad didn't describe any details of the battles he was going through, though obviously he continued his involvement in the thick of the American advance.

“...I am getting along first rate and manage to sleep warm in spite of the rather cold weather we are having. We have a little shack in which we put a board floor and with about six inches of hay and two of us sleeping together we are quite comfortable..”

Taken off the line – October 22, 1918

I learned from my discussion with Dad that despite his saying (above) that he was doing “first rate,” he really wasn't. The cold, wet weather and being at the front in harsh conditions had an adverse affect on the sprain injury he had experienced back in July 1918 when he was unloading the large bag of oats from a truck. He told me that he got rheumatism in that shoulder and was doubled over from that, and was in a lot of pain. He was taken off the line, in the midst of battle, then taken to the base hospital in the city of Orleans. This is what was included in the article written by a journalist in his home town in Pennsylvania:

“...Private Miller was with his company from September 26 until October 22, when he was invalided to the base hospital at Orlean on account of an injury to his left arm, which rendered it useless. He had met with an accident early in July, but remained with his regiment until cold and exposure incapacitated him from further duty...”

From a history of the 314th Field Artillery (a history of the Supply Company of the 314th, called “Our Answer to the Call”), I infer that Dad would have been at a valley between the towns of Montfaucon and Nantillois (north of Verdun and part of the offensive of the First Army), which is where the 314th was located at that time.

To Dad's credit, despite the painful experience – the sprain in his shoulder - in July 1918, he soldiered on through the pain to perform his critical role as a forward artillery observer.

Another perspective on Dad's 80th Division and the 319th and 320th regiments – News report by Charles J. Doyle, special correspondent of The Gazette Times (Pittsburgh paper, I believe), dated November 15, 1919

Here was the headline of that article from the front:

“Pennsylvania Guard Division Battles Till Armistice Hour on Sector East of St. Mihiel: Fighters of Twenty-Eighth in Thick of Final Blow – Eightieth Division Sent Back to Recuperate Just Before Signing of Truce After Brilliant Work in Drive on Sedan”

Doyle states that “Reaching France late in the war, I was fortunate in getting into intimate touch with the last great drive made by the American fighters. After following the Eightieth Division in its spectacular swing toward Sedan, I dropped down to St. Mihiel at its finish. Two Pennsylvania divisions, the Twenty-Eighth and the Eightieth, were recuperating there after their severe fighting. Among those who made this final smash were thousands of Western Pennsylvania and West Virginia men in the 319th and 320th regiments.

He went on to say how the peasants, following the Armistice, “showered praise on their liberators, who marched, wheeled and maneuvered as steadily and easily as though they had not carried heavy sacks over tiring roads for hours.”

Clearly, Dad's division, the 80th, was in the thick of battle until the end. (Exhibit V for a somewhat tattered copy of the report by Charles Doyle)

Somehow, Dad had a passion for being in the midst of battle, as evidenced by this later letter:

November 14, 1918 Orleans, France – letter to his Aunt Maude, wife of Milo H. Miller

“.. I couldn't get out (of his hospital room) to share in the good times here. From the accounts of some of the boys who were out, the French people certainly did cut loose...”

I'm afraid I am going to fall down on the helmet proposition. I had a dandy I got off a German prisoner our boys were bringing back, but I had to leave I when I started to the hospital. I didn't have the pleasure of getting any Huns by my own hands, for you know the artillery is some distance back of the infantry. Of course we know from the amount of ammunition we fired we must have got about five Germans for every man in the regiment, but we didn't have the satisfaction of seeing them go down.

I did have the satisfaction of firing on a Dutch Aeroplane one day but so

far as I know did no damage..”

I don't know what he was firing, a rifle, cannon, or whatever. I didn't think that as a forward artillery observer that they would actually fire weapons, but obviously he did in this case. I'm a bit surprised that Dad was so eager to “have the pleasure of getting any Huns by my own hands.” That shows the passion that one holds in time of war – a passion often needed for victory..

Hospitalization at Orleans

Dad was sent to several hospitals, then finally to Orleans, France, where he was to stay until he returned to the United States. This is a flavor of his letters home from Orleans:

November 2, 1918 Orleans, France – Base Hospital 202, APO #797 - letter to his brother Mark

“Dear Brother,

Well here I am but nothing wrong with me to cause any worry. Am back here (from the front) to get rid of a touch of rheumatism, some sore muscles and to get generally rested and built up.

The wet muddy weather I went thru on the front got into my back and shoulders, which never fully recovered from that sprain I got in July, so they sent me off and after going thru three hospitals I settled down here last Sunday. This is sure Heaven after the front and as soon as I get rid of my dreams (!!) at night I know I'll get built up in great shape. Am getting the best of care and am able to walk around some...”

November 9, 1918 Orleans, France – letter to his father

Dear Father,

“I am still in the hospital. Am getting along fine but as you know, rheumatism is a slow thing to cure so will probably be here for some time yet. It is raining here now and that is hard on the rheumatism, too. If we could have nice sunshine as we have in the States in the fall, I would soon be alright again...”

November 14, 1918 Orleans, France – letter to his Aunt Maude, wife of Milo H. Miller

“.. I couldn't get out (of his hospital room) to share in the good times here. From the accounts of some of the boys who were out, the French people certainly did cut loose.”..

November 19, 1918 Orleans, France – letter to his mother

.. This is a very pretty little city. They have a wonderful cathedral, which I was in, and there are many beautiful chateaux that I want to see if I remain here long enough..

We have good food here (at the hospital) and I have picked up a lot (of weight) since I came off the line (on October 22).

He stayed at that hospital from his arrival there on or about October 22, until he arrived back in America on January 1, 1919. He was at the hospital in Orleans when the armistice was celebrated on November 11, 1918. I'm not sure what he would have told his father during that time, however, but his father wrote a letter on November 10 and finished it on November 11, relieved that the war had finally ended and asking Dad how he was doing. That letter finally caught up with Dad on January 23, 1919!

Back in the United States – January 2, 1919

Dad was delighted to be back in America:

“...At last I am back in”God's Country” at little the worse for wear but tickled to death to be here. We are very comfortable here in the Old Soldier's Home. My general health is excellent and I am anxiously waiting for a chance to get a some real home grub again. Don't know how long they will keep us here but don't think it will be long. Will probably be send to some hospital in Pittsburgh or may get my discharge here..”

He gave his address as Debarkation Hospital #51, Hampton, Virginia. Before he sent that letter home, he had sent a telegram on January 1, 1919, from Newport News, Virginia saying:

“...Arrived OK, Newport News this morning, letter to follow..” (Exhibit VI)

General Hospital No. 9, Lakewood, New Jersey – letter of January 21, 1919

Somewhere early in January 1919, Dad was placed in the General Hospital at Lakewood, New Jersey, where he was able to get the treatment necessary for his disabled arm. Here is how he describes his condition:

“...I have been transferred to the Orthopedic Ward and at last I am to have something done for what really ails me. They have ordered what they call aeroplasse splint for me, while while being a horrible looking contraption is really no splint at all. The trouble the Doc says is all due to that sprain I got last July. He said that as I had no attention at that time, the muscles on top of

my shoulder being injured fell away. My arm has been hanging at my side so long that these muscles are drawn out and what he wants to do is get the weight of my arm off them so they can contract again and build up. Furthermore, the ball and socket joint, is slightly lipped..."

From what I can gather from his letters and the photos taken during his stay at the hospital in Lakewood, he was taken care of very well. He had to wear the "contraption" for quite a few weeks, but apparently it improved from day to day. However, Dad received a 25% disability pension for that problem shoulder for the rest of his life. Somehow he was able to golf quite often, despite that shoulder injury. I saw him wince at times when he was driving and had to take a quick look over his left shoulder.

The nurses who cared for Dad (and others) at the Lakewood hospital



Jim Miller (front row, second from left) with nurse and fellow

soldiers at General Hospital No. 9, Lakewood, NJ 1919

Wecome home! February 5, 1919

Before Dad was discharged, he was able to get a furlough and return to his home in Hartstown, Pennsylvania to visit his family. Apparently he got quite a nice welcome in his home town, for here is what was in the newspaper on February 5, 1919.

“The residence of M. M. Miller was the scene of a happy gathering recently. The occasion was the homecoming of Private James M. Miller, a member of the 314th Field Artillery, from France. The neighbors showed their interest in the event by a generous display of flags from the depot to the home. A number met him at the train, while others welcomed him along the street. The friends of the returning soldier boy were deeply touched by this evidence of their interest, and wish to thank the neighbors for the compliment.”

The last letter from Dad before he left the service – February 18, 1919, from the hospital at Lakewood, New Jersey.

At the hospital during these last few weeks of his service, Dad was getting treatments for his should daily, but also had time for walks and some classes. He was able to take a course in commercial law, plus being able to “fool around” the art metal and woodworking shop. In the evenings, he was able to go to a movie or to the War Camp Community Soldier's Club, apparently what had been a very nice dwelling house, where the rugs had been taken up and a number of pool tables placed in the rooms.

Back home after discharge

Below are two photos who were his support while he was in the service and then a bit later, (1) Dad with his parents and (2) his wife to be – my mother – in Dad's uniform at his home in Hartstown, Pennsylvania in about 1921. They were married in July 1922. First, Dad with his parents at their home in Hartstown, Crawford County, Pennsylvania





Dad's continuing service after WWI

Dad continued to service his country and community throughout his life. In the years after World War I, he joined the local American Legion Post in Irwin, Pennsylvania, and became the commander. Here is Dad in 1938 (when I was six years old – and I DO remember this) leading the Memorial Day parade on Pennsylvania Avenue in Irwin, Pennsylvania (25 miles east of Pittsburgh), and then delivering the speech at the cemetery that day.



The photo above is Jim Miller, post commander American Legion Post 359, Irwin, Pennsylvania, Memorial Day, May 1938

The photo below is Dad giving the Memorial Day speech at the cemetery in Irwin, Pennsylvania, May 1938



In addition to serving as the post commander for a number of years in our home town in Pennsylvania, he became the president of the local chapter of the Kiwanis Club and eventually became a Lieutenant Governor for the Kiwanis in our part of Pennsylvania.

When World War II started, Dad became the head of the local gas and sugar rationing boards, something that consumed his evenings and Saturdays throughout the war. No sooner would Dad return from work at Westinghouse in Pittsburgh at then end of a day that the phone would start ringing, calls from all the people who wanted to find a way to increase their weekly ration of gasoline, in particular.

And finally, once of his greatest services, father and husband!

With all of the outward oriented services, some of his greatest service was to his wife, my mother, and to the four of us children. Despite the difficulties involved in funding college educations on his salary at the Westinghouse Electric Corporation, he managed to put my three sisters and I through colleges: my two older sisters to Allegheny College in Meadville, Pennsylvania; my younger sister to Dad's alma mater, the Carnegie Institute of Technology; and me to Northwestern University.

Here is a look at Jim's family in about 1936



**Jim Miller and family at home in North Irwin, Pennsylvania 1936
(Back: Dad, Shirley, Mother: Front: Carol, Myron, Janice)**

Conclusion

My father's experience in World War I had a lifelong impact on his life, and on the lives of us who were his family. Despite his ambivalence about going into the service in 1917, when provided with an opportunity to serve with the special skills and knowledge he had acquired in his education and work experience, he jumped eagerly at that opportunity, despite the great danger in being a forward artillery observer. He performed admirably during his four weeks in combat, and then took about six months to get through the hospitalization to repair his damaged shoulder. For his willingness to put himself – with great enthusiasm – into the forefront of combat, and do it with conviction – yes, to me he was a hero!

A special thanks!

I/we owe a special thanks to our renaissance uncle, Milo H. Miller, actually Dad's uncle, my great-uncle. He kept a number of Dad's letters and sent them to him in July 1937 so that we children might some day be able to read them. It took a while, just 73 years for me to get around to extracting the great story from those letters. At the same time, Dad's parents – my grandparents – were also great savers, so they kept some of Dad's letters and put them in the box that sat so quietly in my home for all the years since Dad died in 1965.

Uncle Milo was the great family historian and genealogist. He published genealogies of his parents' families – the Miller and Ellis families – in 1933 and 1935, and provided much of the basis I needed to prove my linkages to several Mayflower ancestors, Myles Standish and John Alden. Thanks, “Uncle” Milo!

Post script to World War I

I lived in Belgium from September 1988 until the end of December 1990. During that time I had the opportunity to visit the battle sites and the cemeteries from World War I (in addition to those of World War II). I was able to visit the Memorial Day services at Flanders Field in May 1989 and Liege, Belgium in May 1990. Visiting those cemeteries on those occasions gives a sense of the sacrifice made by the American men and women who served us – and our allies – during both world wars. Here is a brief look at the ceremony and the setting for the Memorial Day service at Flanders Field in 1988: (the program is attached as Exhibit VII).



Flanders Field (Belgium) ceremony – Memorial Day, May 1989



The Cemetery at Flanders Field

The photos don't show two of the most impressive aspects of that service in 1989. First, just prior to the service starting, a group of Belgian first grade students marched down a road leading to the ceremony site, each holding a small American flag and a Belgian flag. When they got onto the grassy area beside the memorial building they sang OUR national anthem!

Second, while 200 American attended that day, 2,000 Belgians attended the service to honor the fallen soldiers and also to give thanks to the Americans for what we did in both world wars!

Bibliography

Fortunately, since the end of World War I, a lot of information has been gathered which allowed me to enhance what my Dad's letters contained. Here is a one of those resources.

This is entitled:

***Our Answer to the Call
Supply Company 314th Field Artillery, World War I
organized by Linda Cunningham Fluharty***

This is a book about the 314th Field Artillery Supply Company, written after World War I so it provides the names of the places where the 314th was located almost day by day from Camp Lee until the end of the war. Whereas Dad was not able to indicate his location, this book fills in the blanks.

<http://www.lindapages.com/wags-ohio/314-2/314-2.htm>

It is very much to her credit that this information has been assembled and available to us through the Internet. It is necessary to print each page to get the full story of the 314th Field Artillery, but well worth the effort. I was able to determine the exact date when Dad arrived at Camp Lee to join the Supply Company of the 314th.

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