10 February 2011

Emily K. Yates

I chose a letter from this website: [***http://www.celticcousins.net/paloalto/ww1letters.htm***](http://www.celticcousins.net/paloalto/ww1letters.htm). The author is writing their friend.

He writes to say they are grateful for mail, for news from home, and that they are ‘toughing’ it out. That although conditions are not remotely ideal that they are determined to see it through.

He mentions how they were not prepared for what it would be like at the front lines. He relates see an airplane battle over head and the falling shrapnel. He talks about getting his mask in just a few seconds, to be protected from the gas attacks, “The gas alarm was also given last night. That is when us boys take special pains in getting our masks on in a hurry. We all hate to put them on but they have saved our lives many time for the Germans shoot over gas to us quite often and I have put my mask on in five seconds”. This brings up a very personal view of the class topics discussing how warfare had so drastically changed. Our book, Alan Brinkley’s “Unfinished Nation”, mentions how entrenched warfare was hard to breach. Combating troops used poisonous mustard gas to attack entrenched soldiers and its use “required troops to carry gas masks at all times”.

On a lighter notes, I enjoyed that a few letters, including this one, commented on the structures of houses and of buildings. How there weren’t many ‘frame’ houses made of wood as we saw at the time in America (and still today); the buildings in Europe were largely made of stone and concrete. There are a lot of reasons behind this including the deforestation of Europe over the centuries.

This observation is a wonderful example of how separated each continent was from each other. Many people lived and died in the same state or country that they were born in. The world was still a big place. Information came sporadically through newspapers, not lightening fast through the internet and the computers and smart phones that many in the world now have access to.

I think there is a great value in understanding all the different perspectives of historical events. This war was less than a hundred years ago, not that much time has passed. The changes in warfare have continued to evolve. I think that understanding an individual’s point of view during these events assists us in achieving a greater understanding of where we are as societies today and how we got there. I believe that history repeats it’s self because we do not educate ourselves and so we continue our pattern.

***Ruthven Free Press*
Ruthven, Palo Alto, Iowa
Wednesday, October 9, 1918**

A LETTER FROM FRANCE
Lawrence Anderson Writes Interestingly

    Somewhere in France
            at the front
            September 4, 1918

Dear Mr. Foy:
    Have often thought of writing you a letter so will while the thought is in my mind. We are kept so busy that we do not have much time to think of home but if there is any spare time we all et busy and write letters home.
    [tear in paper] have been at the front now for [tear in paper] time where we see real battles [tear in paper] every day. This morning [tear in paper] an airoplane battle up in the air. It is very interesting to see a battle of this kind. The woods are so thick around here that the planes soon get out of our sight. We didn't see how the fight ended up but I am sure that Fritz got all that was coming to him. Last night the Germans shot us very heavy. Shrapnels falling all around us of course during the bombardment it kept us from getting our sleep. The gas alarm was also given last night. That is when us boys take special pains in getting our masks on in a hurry. We all hate to put them on but they have saved our lives many time for the Germans shoot over gas to us quite often and I have put my mask on in five seconds.
    Mr. Foy I must thank you for sending me the home paper. We have not been getting our mail for about three weeks today. We boys sure get cheered up when mail comes and we hear from home. I got one letter and your paper today. It makes me feel closer to home when I get the Free Press to read and those letters from the soldiers from home there letters being very interesting, but when the boys in camps in the states come over across they sure will have some real experiences to tell about. We boys sure have found out what this war is about after we reached the front. The more these dam Germans shoot at us the more we want to go over the top. We are sure tough nuts we don't care for anything, sleeping out on the ground, living on hard tack and corn beef is common every day.
    I am now working at battallion head quarters taking important messages from place to place. I like this job much better than what I have been doing. The boys that left Ruthven when I did are all in different camps now. My friend Guy Larson is in M company and Fred Clasing in the engineers. Have heard that Lloyd Wigdahl was in 357 infantry but am not sure, haven't been able to see Lloyd since we left Camp Dodge, Guy Larson and I can visit each other quite often. I was to see Guy yesterday and gave him the home paper. He doesn't get it so I always give him mine when I get through reading it. The last paper I got was dated June 8 but never the less how old they are we are sure glad to get it just because it is from home. I understand we are going to get mail  again tomorrow.
    France is beautiful in some places with its flowers and crops. We have to give them credit for their good roads and water all along the roads are trimmed trees and in many places fruit trees and hazel nuts, butter nuts and most every kind of nuts raised in this country.
    I haven't been able to find a house or barn in France that is made of wood. They are all built of rock and concrete. Some of these buildings I have been told are one hundred years old, there barns are not very often separated from the houses. It seems queer to see the oxen teams. I was surprised to see the big loads that they can hold.
    Well my letter is getting quite long so I will close.
    From a soldier at the front doing his bit for his country.
            Your friend,
    LAURENCE M. ANDERSON,
    Co K 358 Infantry. A.E.F. Via N.Y.