

A letter also figured prominently in the story of Pvt. Gaffrey, the first World War casualty.

The letter, written the week before his death and received by his mother, Mrs. J H Trask, 60 East 9<sup>th</sup> St. after she learned he had been killed, gives a good picture of what war was like in the trenches, and the innocence of the young doughboys.

Written from "Somewhere in France", July 18, 1918, the letter said (in part):

My Dear Mother and All: I received your letters and was mighty glad to get them, for it was good to hear from home once more. I am in fine health had a nice trip across and didn't get one bit seasick because I was down in the mess hall sewing the whole trip over here. Saw the Brooklyn Bridge, and the Statue of Liberty just before leaving...

This is some country. Nothing but hills and mountains, but there is lots of beautiful scenery I saw most of England and also saw Paris, but there is no place like the good old USA.

"The weather is pleasant, but it rains most every day and the mud is just like clay. We are wearing wrapped leggings now. I have had all kinds of train and truck rides since we landed. We rode through France in cattle cars and it was from one of these that I saw Paris.

"I've had a good bit of bayonet and automatic rifle practice and have shot at the bit rifle range here. Made three good hills eyes out of five shooting with my gas mask on. We get lots of visits from the Fritzies for they send us a gas shell quite often. When the Germans see a bayonet they run like rabbits and holler mercy comrade, but they have no mercy for them over here.

"The Americans captured 1,900 Germans in a trap just the other day. That isn't saying how many they killed for every other man was supplied with an automatic rifle and they sure did pick them off in great style. A shell struck the ground pretty close to where we were and it made a hole big enough to hold 15 men standing up.

"I have seen quite a number of enemy airplanes downed since I've been here. There are airplanes flying everywhere and shrapnel bursting all around. We sleep in our little pup tents every night and have our gas masks and helmets right beside us so that we can get them on in a hurry. I'm getting pretty well used to wearing my helmet now. It looks just a like a wash basin turned upside down. We were on a three day hike and it sure put a lot of pep into me,

"The boys back home can't imagine what a great time I am having and of the country I have seen. Every day is like the 4<sup>th</sup> of July here. We stay up every night until midnight watching the fireworks and the roar of the big guns is just like music to us. I am a carrier in a Bombers Squad now, and have also thrown a lot of bombs. One of the boys over here gave me a French harp, so I can entertain myself pretty well.

"It is only when I am on guard and all alone that I think of the ones left behind. Tell Willie I think of him every day and to be good to his mother. Tell my friends that it is most impossible for me to write to everyone I know because writing paper is very scarce. They have a YMCA here, but as we are in the War Zone it is hard to get away to get paper. Now don't worry about me because I get plenty to eat and all the Bull Durham I can smoke, am in good health and safe as ever.

"Give all the neighbors my best regards. Must close now as it is time to go to work on our dugout. Goodbye and Gob Bless all of you. With love to all and until I return I am your Soldier Boy.

Private Edward Gaffrey"

Private Gaffrey spent three years in a quiet little American cemetery in Western Europe. In 1921 the body was returned home for burial but not without some problems en route. The afternoon train on the Lake Erie Railroad line was met by an escort from the American Legion post but the casket was not on board.

The body had arrived at Hoboken, NY on a large army transport and was removed to a dock when a large fire broke out, destroying the docks and warehouses. It was with difficulty that the hundreds of corpses were saved, the newspaper reported. This resulted in the delay.

On its arrival the casket was taken to the mother's home. Pvt. Gaffrey was accorded full military honors, and the body lay in state in the rotunda of the courthouse before the services at the First Methodist Church and at the cemetery.

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In World War I, Edward Charles Gaffrey was killed in action near Epieds, Aisne, France, July 25, 1918, less than four months after he left home. Gaffrey's body was buried in France, later brought home and interred at Mount Hope Cemetery.

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### **The French counter-offensive: The second victory of the Marne - July 15 to 31, 1918**

This second battle of the Marne, largely won by the French troops, was to rescue Paris and France, and brought back 3300 machine guns, 500 guns, and 35,000 German prisoners.

In this battle, let us also specify that the war material is French, tanks Renault FT 17, French heavy artillery and aviation. The English also have their war material.

The Americans fight with French or English material (they do not have equipment, this army is only the 16th army of the world at that time)

See why the Germans went on the offensive in early 1918?

After several important victories, the Germans are finally stopped by a French counter offensive led by General Mangin on 28 June. But the Germans did not say their last words: They launched the offensive of peace, fortunately the French crushed the Germans on July 15, 1918 in the defensive battle of Champagne.

Nearly 40,000 Germans are killed, wounded or prisoners. Not less than 5000 Frenchmen are hors de combat. This victory which saved France was the result of the good defensive and offensive dispositions of General Petain, who had become General-in-Chief of the French army.

Three days after this defensive victory of the 4th French Army, Foch (General-in-Chief of the Allied Armies) decides to reduce the pocket of Chateau-Thierry to put an end to all hopes of marching on Paris to the Germans.

So on July 18th, at 4:30 am, from Bouresches to Pernant, on the front of 55 kilometers of the armies Mangin and Degoutte (10th and 6th armies), our artillery triggers a formidable shot.

It is a rolling barrier behind which jumble 470 tanks of assault: 320 French tanks in front of Mangin and 150 in front of Degoutte.

A cloud of French and English aircraft obscures the sky and cleans it of enemies.

They expected a French offensive; But in spite of the experience of the 28th of June, they conceived of it no other way than that preceded by a preparation of artillery of three or four hours. Nothing had announced this charge of the steel monsters, the Chars FT 17 of Renault.

It was the 9th German Army of General Von Einem and the right of the 7th German Army of General Von Boëhm that supported the shock. They have 8 German divisions in the front line and 10 German divisions in immediate support. In an instant, everything is encompassed in the battle, and we must hasten to call back reinforcements.

The 26th, 69th, 167th, 168th, 169th, 164th, 418th, 265th, 72nd, 91st, 136th, 23rd, 42nd, 128th, 48th, 70th, 71st, 9th, 11th, 20th, 8th, 110th, 208th, 133rd, 152nd, 170th, 174th, 409th infantry regiments; The 1st, 4th, 8th, 9th Zouaves, 7th, 8th, 9th Tirailleurs, 1st and 4th Mixed; The 2nd, 4th, 41st, 43rd, 59th battalions of Foot Hunters, the Moroccan, Malagasy and Russians regiments, as well as several American battalions, rush to the assault.

The Poilus do not let themselves be discouraged by the many German machine guns which prevent them from passing, they still pass by crushing grenades the German machine gunners, the German battery shots do not impress them anymore, they capture them in melee, bayonet To the cannon, like the Zouaves who captured 4 cannons with the white weapon.

At noon the villages of Dammard, Belleau, Troesnes, and Villers-Helon were captured by the French troops. On the left, the Moroccan division (Zouaves, Tirailleurs, Legion) surpassed Chaudun, and the Americans seized Vierzy.

In the evening, the two French armies number 12,000 German prisoners; A record figure for a single day of battle. On 55 kilometers of front of attack, our lines progressed towards the east of about ten kilometers.

The left of Mangin already holds the plateaux to 3 kilometers of Soissons.

By removing the plateau of Pernant, the 11th division has already made 2000 German prisoners.

On the 19th of July, at four o'clock in the morning, a new rush followed the same method to which the enemy had not had time to accustom themselves. Same success. However towards Chaudun where two fresh German divisions, the 9th and the 20th were transported by auto-trucks, our columns are an arrested moment.

Everywhere else, French progression continues; Entire companies of German soldiers surrendered to our tanks, and only the newly intervened German divisions were fighting energetically. The 10th Frenchman surpassed the Plessis-Huleu, the 6th French army took Neuilly-Saint-Front and conquered the plateau of Priez.

This important success makes the situation of the Germans extremely difficult. Du Plessis-Huleu, our French machine-guns forbid the road from Soissons to Chateau-Thierry, and our French guns the railroad. These are the only arteries which the German Army of Von Boëhm has to supply the forces fighting on the Marne.

Now, the army of Mitry attacked in turn between Saint-Aignan and Boursault. We must go back. Von Boehm does it very skilfully; And in the night of 19 to 20, it evacuates the south bank of the Marne.

**On 20 July**, to avoid the choking of the Chateau-Thierry pocket and the loss of the troops involved there, Ludendorff sent five fresh reinforcing divisions against our 10th French Army.

General Mangin progressed all the same towards Hartennes and maintained on all his front the gains of the day before; But the efforts of our 41st French division break against the resistance of Oulchy-le-Château.

General Degoutte pushes forward vigorously; And it is now on this side, the struggle for Château-Thierry, already overrun by the North, while de Mitry continues its pressure to the south, and that the 5th French Army of Berthelot attacks the pocket by the east.

**On July 21**, in order to maintain its pivot of maneuver, the enemy attacked furiously Mangin, accumulating against him constantly renewed manpower. The heroic French regiments of Mangin hold fast and repel the Germans.

Degoutte enters Chateau-Thierry, driving back through the Tardenois the German divisions of Von Boehm, whose resistance becomes decidedly soft.

In the evening, the 6th French Army advanced about ten kilometers and the line of our vanguards passed near Hartennes and Oulchy-le-Château, which still holds, beyond Grisolles, Bézu-saint- Germain and Epieds.

The second victory of the Marne, a prelude to larger-scale operations, was won. It is complete. It forms a magnificent ensemble of classical perfection, bearing the brilliant mark of French valor and genius.

Right and center, Gouraud and Berthelot, thanks to the sublime spirit of sacrifice of the poilus of the islets of resistance, constituted the wall against which the assault of the Germans broke. It was **July 15, 1918**.

On the left, De Mitry, Degoutte and Mangin concentrically danced on the German right wing; And, thanks to an admirable preparation and a lightning speed of execution, crushed it.

The results were: The capture of 20,000 German prisoners, more than 400 German guns, 3300 captured German machine guns, the irreparable absorption and wear of sixty German divisions, the delivery of Château-Thierry and the obligation Ludendorff to abandon quickly the pocket of Fere-en-Tardenois where he can no longer supply his troops, since he is neither master of Reims nor of the railroad to the south of Soissons.

The French victory was won, but the struggle continued fiercely, for it was necessary to exploit success; And, from the generalissimo to the humblest soldier, every one employs himself with the last energy.

**On 24 July**, the French division of General Roig-Bourdeville captured Oulchy-la-ville from the Germans, and his regiments (5th, 74th and 224th infantry regiments) captured 600 German prisoners.

**On 25 July**, Oulchy-le-Chateau fell, attacked in front by the 23rd French infantry regiment and on the reverse by the **128th infantry regiment of the Bablon division**.

On the other side, General Berthelot's French army is on the outskirts of Ville-en-Tardenois; And in a magnificent assault, the 103rd Infantry Regiment, which, since July 15, had lost almost all its officers and 75 per cent of its forces, took the village of Romigny from the Germans

**On 26 July**, Von Boëhm released the Marne and blew up the bridges of the Ourcq. In the evening our French infantry is at Bruyeres, Villeneuve-sur-Fere, and Courmont. At night, one fights at Ronchères, where the enemy resists, thanks to a powerful artillery.

**On July 27**, Mangin attacked Buzancy, Degoutte crossed Fere-en-Tardenois; Berthelot goes beyond Ville-en-Tardenois; The enemy holds hard; Elsewhere, he yielded and our French cavalry picked up trophies or managed to keep contact.

On the 1st of August, our French regiments forced the Germans to resist in the village of Hartennes, where the Germans had accumulated powerful means; And in the evening the 206th, 234th, and 244th infantry regiments of the Menvielle division brilliantly removed the villages of Cramaille and Servenay.

The front of the 10th French army at night reached the line of Grand-Rozoy-Cramaille. Von Boëhm, threatened in his rear, will hasten his retreat, covering it with small detachments armed with machine guns, who are ordered to sacrifice themselves to stop our columns.

On August 3, the Germans line the Vesle, pursued by our skirmishers. The results of the victory are acquired: the pocket of Château-Thierry is reduced; the railway from Paris to Strasbourg is free.

This brilliant victory, brilliant as a thunderbolt on the morrow of the most decisive successes of Germany, had an immense resonance throughout the world. No one was mistaken: this time it was the end. The German Empire had made its fortune in the great shocks of the Western French front, and had just lost it.

On the 6th of August, Clemenceau proposed to the President of the Republic to make General Foch, whose victory began to crown the energy and calculations, a Marshal of France:

[FOCH; Marshal de France] "*The dignity of the Marshal of France,*" said his report, "*will not only be a reward for past services, it will devote even better in the future the authority of the great man of war called to lead the army of the Agreement to the definitive victory.*"

The decree of August 7, appointing General Foch Marshal of France, motivated this appointment by the simple summary of the results obtained in the second victory of the Marne:

*"Paris cleared; Soissons and Chateau-Thierry reconquered from high struggle; More than 200 villages delivered, 35,000 German prisoners, 700 German guns captured; 3300 captured German machine guns; The hopes highly proclaimed by the enemy before his attack collapsed; The glorious Allied armies thrown into a single victorious push from the banks of the Marne to the banks of the Aisne, are the results of a maneuver so admirably conceived by the French High Command, as superbly executed by incomparable chiefs and soldiers."*

Text from "La grande guerre vécue, racontée, illustrée par les Combattants, en 2 tomes Aristide Quillet, 1922" <https://archive.org/details/19141918iedixneu02chriuoft>

And from "Michelin, guide des champs de bataille ; la deuxième bataille de la Marne, 1919 "

(Translated with Google Translate)

Not sure Private Gaffrey was laid to rest here. Private Ploss was

[https://www.abmc.gov/cemeteries-memorials/europe/aisne-marne-american-cemetery#.WMY6\\_Ge1v9Q](https://www.abmc.gov/cemeteries-memorials/europe/aisne-marne-american-cemetery#.WMY6_Ge1v9Q)

tour of the Meuse-Argonne Cemetery:

[https://www.abmc.gov/sites/default/files/interactive/interactive\\_files/meuse\\_tour.html](https://www.abmc.gov/sites/default/files/interactive/interactive_files/meuse_tour.html)