



“The Best War I Ever Expect to Have”: Hall County Doughboys’ Letters Home

(Article begins on page 2 below.)

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Article Summary: During World War I the Grand Island *Daily Independent* published over two hundred letters from military personnel. Its “Letters from Our Lads on the Front” provide a window into the lives of Hall County military personnel in almost real time. Most were written within days or even hours of the events about which they comment, so the memories and emotions were still fresh and sometimes raw.

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Veterans Quoted: Harold Prince, Ed Fowlie, Stanley Bartlett, Daniel Griffith, Albert Shoemaker, Arthur Roeser, Oscar Roeser, Reed Harrison, George Coates

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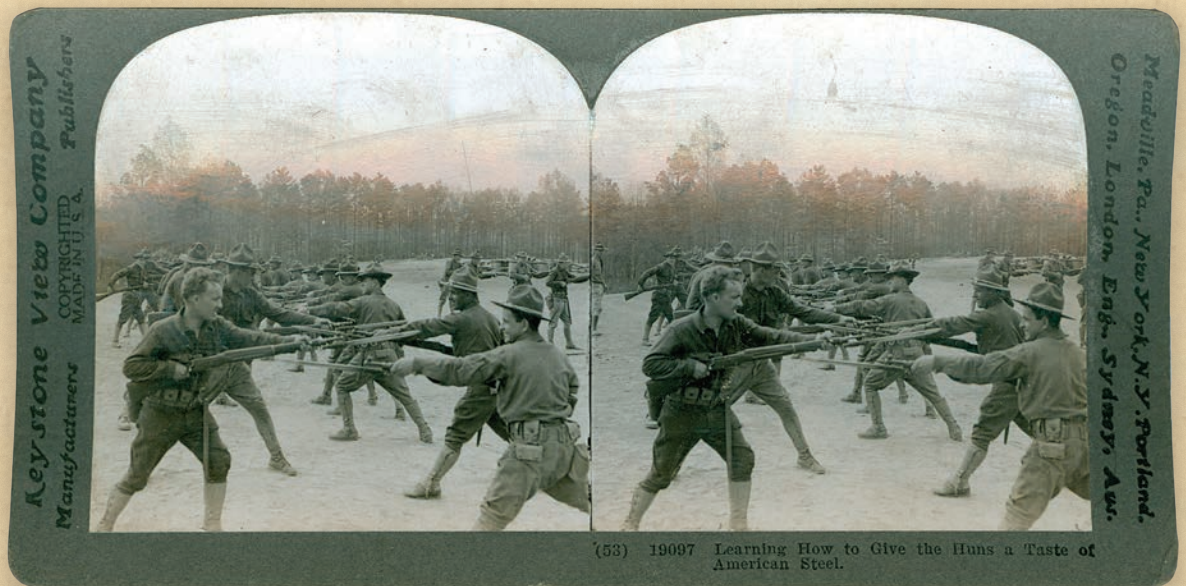
Keywords: World War I, *Grand Island Daily Independent*, German-Americans, Council of Defense

Photographs / Images: stereocard of a bayonet charge; Harold Prince; inset letter (*Grand Island Daily Independent*, October 3, 1917); Liederkranz Hall, Grand Island, home to a German singing society; some of Hall County’s veterans; Third Street looking east, Grand Island; World War Memorial, Memorial Park, Grand Island

THE BEST WAR I EVER EXPECT TO HAVE: ♦

HALL COUNTY DOUGHBOYS' LETTERS HOME

BY DARYL WEBB



"If there is one thing the German fears more than anything else it is a bayonet charge," wrote an employee of the Keystone View Company as part of a little essay on the back of this stereocard. European soldiers already knew they had more to fear from artillery and machine guns, but cards like these were not meant to instruct soldiers but to rally the American public as their country entered the war. NSHS 8480-6-13 F

“These are the days that try men’s souls over here,” wrote U.S. Army First Lieutenant Harold Prince from a trench in France during World War I. “The nights are generally quiet,” Prince explained to his family back in Grand Island, Nebraska. “Then comes a crash of the big guns, but more ominous by far than that out of the quiet night comes the sinister ‘put-put-put-put’ of the machine guns. Then all is quiet again. Up goes a brilliant flame, again the ‘put-put-put-put’ of the machine gun, then quiet again. Such is the night. Then the daylight comes. Airplanes fly far overhead an occasional shell or two [is dropped], so it is day after day, night after night.” Prince explain that this was nature of battle for weeks on end, “no permanent change of important lines, then a push, a slaughter, a battle, a counter charge, until finally equilibrium is again established, quiet and peace again. Such is war on the front.”¹

Prince, like so many other Grand Island men who served in World War I, recorded his experiences in letters home to friends, sweethearts, and family members. These letters tell the story of Grand Island and other Hall County servicemen’s wartime lives. Much of this correspondence appeared in the Grand Island *Daily Independent*, which published over two hundred letters from military personnel. Most of the men who authored the letters were from Grand Island, although a few letters were from rural or small-town Hall County men. These men’s friends and family members apparently simply brought the servicemen’s personal letters to the newspaper and the *Daily Independent* published them in the column “Letters from Our Lads on the Front.” The letters provide a window into the lives of Hall County military personnel in almost real time. Most were written within days or even hours of the events about which they comment so the memories and emotions were still fresh and sometimes raw.

While the letters offer great insights into World War I military life, they also hold pitfalls for scholars. The letters are not without editing. At various points U.S. military personnel read and edited personal correspondence by enlisted men, removing any information that might give the enemy details about troop movements or strategy. This knowledge caused the doughboys to self-edit, fearing some information might not make it past the official censor. Many were also aware that the *Daily Independent* published military men’s letters and knew that their correspondence might appear in the newspaper. Some welcomed this publicity and appear to have written for public



First Lieutenant Harold Prince of Grand Island.
From A. F. Buechler, R. J. Barr, and Dale P. Stough,
History of Hall County Nebraska (Lincoln: Western Publishing & Engraving Co., 1920), 540.

consumption. Others, knowing their letters might appear in the paper, may not have been as honest and forthcoming as they might have been in a truly private letter.² Along with self-censoring, it is also possible that editing took place in Grand Island. Friends and family members may have removed parts of letters they considered too private to print. In some cases the editors of the *Daily Independent* omitted information. During the first weeks of the column, the paper published only extended excerpts from letters and in other cases information that the editors considered too sensitive was omitted.³ However, while some of the letters may have been altered, they still provide invaluable insights to Hall County doughboys’ wartime experiences. They reveal their bravado and fear, excitement and loneliness, and how they were changed by battle.

When the United States entered the war in 1917, the European conflict had already raged for over two years. Britain, France, Italy, and other Allied powers had fought the Central Powers of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and their partners to a stalemate. When in 1917 the Central Powers began attacking U.S. ships, President Woodrow Wilson reversed the nation’s neutrality stance and the United States entered the war on the Allied side.

When the U.S. declared war in April 1917, a *Daily Independent* editorial urged all Hall County residents, whether they were “pro-Ally or pro-German in months gone by,” to do their patriotic duty and support the war effort. The editorial called for “unison and solidarity at home.” “Our country, its institutions, its democracy plead for this and demand this of us,” the editorial concluded. The newspaper continued to demand unity and solidarity on the part of Hall County

Grand Island Independent,
October 3, 1917, 3

Letters From Our Lads on the Front

Because it is from “one of his boys” the editor takes the liberty to publish the following letter verbatim:

Radio School “N”, Sept. 30, 1917,
Great Lakes, Ill.—Dear “Bue”: Believe I’ll chronicle a few local events for you before I incur your enmity by my silence. Rather fear said enmity inasmuch as I’ve never known it to be displayed and it’s an unknown quantity, so to speak.

Have enjoyed *The Independent* each day, Gus, especially the letters from Grand Island boys at the front. Am able, to a certain degree, to keep track of the fellows who have left for war service. It is cheering, also, to follow the steps being taken by loyal Grand Islanders toward helping their “boys.”

residents throughout the war and promoted total loyalty and support of the war-effort over the nineteen months the U.S. was in the conflict.⁴

To demonstrate their patriotism and loyalty more than 1,200 Hall County men were among the some four million Americans who served in the military during World War I.⁵ These men were motivated to serve for a variety of reasons. Many joined the fight to demonstrate their masculinity. In the early twentieth century a powerful part of the societal definition of manhood was the ability to fight.⁶ It was expressed in the sense of bravado that permeated many letters. Many new recruits talked of wanting to go into battle. “Every man’s desire is to get in touch with the Boche [the Germans],” one man proclaimed during basic training. Fighting the Germans, he emphasized, “is our whole wish.” He concluded that the army was “without question the greatest thing that ever was afforded the manhood of this republic.” Another man was discouraged because he was promoted to sergeant and ordered to remain in the United States. “I would rather go to France as a private, than stay here as a sergeant,” he declared. Hall County men repeatedly referred to battle as fun and exciting. They not only had the desire to join the “fun” of battle, but also saw themselves as brave and skilled fighters. They bragged that the Germans should be afraid because the Yanks were on their way. The German Kaiser, Ed Fowlie announced, “does not know and does not realize what is in store for him and his followers when these boys of ours are turned on him.” The desire to go into battle and demonstrate their bravery and skill as warriors was part of Fowlie’s and many other men’s sense of manhood, and they intended to seize the opportunity the Great War provided to demonstrate their masculinity.⁷

Others felt it was their patriotic responsibility to protect the nation from the Central Powers. One soldier spoke of a debt that he and other men owed Uncle Sam for all the opportunities the country provided. Stanley Bartlett explained that he felt “personally responsible for Old Glory’s preservation.” Implied in Bartlett’s and other soldiers’ comments was that the nation and its freedoms were under siege and that he and other Hall County men needed to do their patriotic duty to save the country from destruction. Harold Prince explained that he fought so democracy would be preserved, and no American would have to bow down and pay homage to the Kaiser. “Millions will endure the hardship of war that America may be a land of freedom,” he asserted.



In the same letter Prince also talked about the higher ideals that he and other men were fighting for and the new world order that an allied victory would create. We fight, Prince explained, “that peace may reign throughout the world for all time to come.” This is “a battle that will tell the history of the world for centuries to come,” Prince proclaimed, “that will tell whether peace, freedom, justice and respect for law shall rule or war, oppression, utter disregard for everything but might, the wholesale ravishment of women, the murder of children, the destruction of churches and acts of utter barbarism shall sway the world.” Prince and the other men were fighting to create a world where peace and justice would prevail.⁸

Because these men were willing to sacrifice so peace and justice might reign, they expected other Americans to support them and the war effort. They took great comfort that people were buying war bonds, planting victory gardens, and supporting other wartime activities. One man explained, “it was cheering also to follow the steps being taken by loyal Grand Islanders toward helping their ‘boys.’” As this statement

implies, however, the doughboys divided Grand Islanders into loyal Americans who bought bonds and planted victory gardens and disloyal Americans who seemingly did not support the war effort. They praised those who were “squarely behind us,” but were angered by others who were critical of American involvement. German-Americans were under the greatest suspicion. Most of the state’s German-Americans fully supported the war, but some opposed it, while others were divided in their loyalty to the United States and to their Fatherland. In the nineteen months that the U.S. was at war, numerous allegations of disloyalty were made against Hall County German-Americans and other area residents. In the spring of 1918 there was a wave of accusations. Several Hall County citizens were alleged to have refused to buy war bonds, another man was accused of making pro-German statements, and one wealthy farmer was charged with withholding his grain from market when the government asked him to sell the crop to help address the food shortage. These cases were turned over to the Hall County Council of

Home to a German singing society, Grand Island’s Liederkranz Hall was vandalized with yellow paint in March 1918, part of a wave of disloyalty accusations in Hall County that spring.

NSHS RG3451-3-159



Some of Hall County's veterans. From *History of Hall County Nebraska*, 518

Defense, a local adjunct of the State Council of Defense, an organization created to ensure loyalty. The Council of Defense investigated the claims and pressured and coerced the accused into fully supporting the war effort.⁹

When Hall County doughboys heard about perceived disloyalty some responded with anger. In one case some Hall County residents had made critical comments about the soldiers, whom they believed only drilled while the men back home

did all the hard work of bringing in the harvest; these comments drew an angry response from eight Nebraska soldiers. They wrote a vigorous defense to the editors of the *Daily Independent*, pointing out that their typical day included a twenty-five mile march across a hot desert with little water and no rest, calling it "Twenty-five miles that was worse than hell." The men urged the folks back home to stop complaining about farm work and remember the sacrifices the doughboys were making. The soldiers concluded by asserting that they would gladly trade places with the men back in Nebraska. Harold Prince was also angry about what he perceived as disloyalty in Grand Island. "Just wait until perhaps a hundred Grand Island boys have given their lives, that they may stay home and make money and sneer at soldiers who protect them, and the country that grants them freedom and prosperity. They may then thank their lucky stars that freedom, perhaps too much of it, reigns in America."¹⁰

While some of the doughboys were concerned about disloyalty back home, they were determined to take full advantage of the opportunities military service offered. For many the Great War was the greatest adventure of their lives. "This is about the best war I ever expect to have," one doughboy explained, "so [I] am enjoying it the best I can." For many Hall County men their time in the military brought opportunities they would not have had. One saw Woodrow Wilson and was overwhelmed by being just twenty feet from the President of the United States; another told of hearing former President Teddy Roosevelt

give a fiery speech and being overcome with a sense of patriotism. Others were thrilled when they were entertained by famous vaudeville acts or opera stars who performed in camps to keep up morale. All of the men recognized that only military service offered them these opportunities. Not only did they get to see stars and presidents, but they also got to taste of what it was like to be a hero. One man told of marching in community parades as he moved from Grand Island to the East

Coast and being greeted by cheers, presents, hugs, and kisses. He called it the "ideal trip." Another man reported that Americans were greeted with wild cheers as they arrived in England, where his company was reviewed by the King. "It was a sight that I will never forget," he explained.¹¹

Another adventure that the military offered was the opportunity to travel. In the early twentieth century travel outside of one's home area was uncommon and military service gave these central Nebraska men a chance to see the nation and the world. Historian David Kennedy, in his study of World War I doughboys, concluded that many servicemen were more tourists than soldiers. The United States got into the war late and the conflict ended a mere nineteen months after Congress declared war so most Americans did not experience combat. Kennedy observed that many servicemen spent more time sightseeing than fighting.¹² This was also true of the Hall County doughboys, and many of the men's letters read more like travel journals than wartime correspondence. Many told of the exciting things they saw and did in parts of the country they had only read about. They commented on everything from the excitement of cities like New York and Chicago to seeing Latinos and African Americans for the first time. After their initial training, many traveled to even more exotic places. One claimed to be the luckiest of marines because he traveled through the Panama Canal. Another announced that he had "the time of his young life" after traveling to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. He called Rio the place of his dreams and declared, "if I ever get tired of civilization, I am going to shove off for South America."¹³

Others shoved off for Europe and many of these men were also as much tourists as soldiers. They told of visiting London, Rome, Milan, and Paris and being impressed by the Eiffel Tower, majestic cathedrals, and beautiful mountain scenery. "We have passed thru scenery that men have paid thousands of dollars to see," one doughboy commented. They were also impressed by how old everything was in Europe. One soldier talked about being awed by visiting a castle and "walking over the same floors and walking through the same rooms frequented by kings and queens and other notables for centuries." Another man was impressed to see places where Oliver Cromwell and Napoleon had been, and still another Grand Islander imagined the knights, whom he was certain had fought fierce battles in the places he visited. While the doughboys were impressed by Europe's antiquity, they frequently

commented on Europeans' backwardness and strange customs. They are "behind the times," one man observed. Others agreed, commenting about the French wearing wooden shoes, children drinking and smoking, and the old-fashioned stone houses. While Hall County men found European customs strange they had good things to say about the people. One man thought Europeans were kind and polite and another called them welcoming. And many men far from home hoped to date French women. One explained that French women were impressed by American soldiers, but others told of having little luck when they tried to "parley" with them.¹⁴

While the war was a great adventure that allowed Hall County men an opportunity to "parley" with French women, it also held many trials and difficulties. "Army life is never an easy life," one soldier complained. Military life simply did not appeal to some men, and they told of their difficulties adjusting to communal living, the strain of long marches and drills, and resentment that they had lost control over their lives. Many men, however, simply resigned themselves to these hardships. "A fellow can get used to anything when he has little choice," one man concluded. The military also required new skills that some men feared they did not have, which created a sense of self-doubt. Daniel Griffith spoke of his uncertainty after being promoted to corporal. He confided to his mother and sister that he made a "pretty slow corporal," but vowed to do the "best I can while on the job."¹⁵

For many men, one of the greatest struggles was the burden their absence created for their families. They knew that their military service caused their wives, mothers, and other loved ones to worry constantly, and many men used their letters to reassure loved ones that they were alright and to urge them not to be concerned. "Don't worry about me Mother dear, as I shall be O. K.," Albert Shoemaker told his mother. Knowing this was probably of little comfort, he reiterated the point in the next line writing "Don't fear about me," but then quickly changed the subject. The men were also concerned that they were not fulfilling their family responsibilities. They worried that their absence forced others to do extra work on the farm and one doughboy hoped the war would be over quickly so he could get back to Nebraska and help with the harvest. Others were concerned that they were not meeting their emotional responsibilities as fathers, brothers, and sons. One man wrote how worried he was about his ill mother and wished he could go home to take care

of her. Another felt guilty for missing his cousin's funeral and others worried that family members were missing their wisdom and advice. Many used their letters to try to fulfill at least some of their family responsibilities by offering comfort and advice to their loved ones. The man who missed his cousin's funeral tried to comfort his family in his letter, but conceded that it was not adequate and wished he could have been there to help provide support. Another man offered dating advice to his younger brother, urging him not to "fancy up" his wagon because that would not attract the right kind of girl. Still another soldier urged his little sister to stop complaining about going to school and reminded her how easy

her life was in Grand Island. He told her about French children who went to school year round in a war zone and helped their mothers in the fields after class. While it was obvious that these men wanted to do more, written advice and comfort was all they could offer.¹⁶

One of the greatest difficulties the men experienced was homesickness. Their letters were filled with longing references to Grand Island, and expressions of how much they missed their loved ones. They told of being "blue" and "lonesome." "I look at your picture often and think of home," one soldier wrote his family. The men also wrote about missing dances, family Christmas parties, and birthday celebrations. One man was so homesick



that he dreamed one night he was back in Nebraska and took a trip to the Omaha stockyards. It “surely felt like I was home,” he longingly explained. These men found ways to cope with their homesickness. Some met other Hall County doughboys as they traveled and these reunions eased their loneliness.

Arthur Roeser was thrilled to encounter an old Grand Island friend in France and told of “spending two afternoons with him, talking over old times.” Some lucky central Nebraska soldiers served together in the same unit and one explained that serving with Grand Island men “makes things a lot more pleasant as you feel you are not alone.” Others made close friends with

men from other parts of the country. And many praised the YMCA for helping to maintain their morale and reduce their melancholy. One of the best ways to ease homesickness was getting mail from loved ones. One doughboy explained that the letters from friends and family “made me feel as though I am close to home, although I am miles away.” Another described letters as being like medicine to a sick man and still another called them the “breath of life to a soldier.” He went on to proclaim that “the mail stack would be defended as stubbornly as a mess kitchen or munitions depot [during an enemy attack].”¹⁷

Many Hall County doughboys did not just talk about going into battle to defend what they



**Third Street looking east,
Grand Island.** NSHS
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loved, but they actually experienced the front lines. Those who were in the trenches and faced the enemy wrote the most moving letters of the entire collection. The sense of bravado and the belief that the war was a great adventure, ever present in the earlier correspondence, was absent from their letters. These soldiers told of the pain and hardship of war, the suffering and loss that battle caused, and how combat changed them.

Like doughboys elsewhere, the men on the front lines endured loneliness, homesickness, and feelings of guilt about not being able to live up to their family responsibilities, but they also endured many additional difficulties. Frontline soldiers lived in trenches dug into the ground. "We are living like prairie dogs," one man explained. The men endured wind, cold, and rain and many described experiencing ankle-deep mud whenever it rained. They also complained about having to share the trenches with a host of non-human creatures. One man told of the "pitched battle" he waged against the rats, trying in vain to beat back the onslaught of rodents with his knife and bayonet. Others complained about trying to fight off other enemies—fleas and lice. Such conditions made sleep extremely difficult and many frontline doughboys wrote of being sleep-deprived. "The worst part of my job now is finding time to sleep . . . I haven't had six hours of sleep in the last two days," one man lamented. Another sardonically explained that "If a man gets a full night of sleep without a disturbance he is generally sick the next day." The men also had to endure bad food and complained about the hardtack and rations they got at the front. They also reported being forced to skip meals frequently. One man described getting only two meals a day and another explained that soldiers in the trenches "undergo hardships such as going without food and water for days at a time when supplies cannot reach us." Another deplored conditions that forced men to revert back to a "savage stage" and wondered if he would ever be able to readjust to "civilization." One soldier simply concluded, "life up here is horrible."¹⁸

The men's letters also reflected the mental stress of life on the front lines. Soldiers in the trenches lived in a constant state of alert, fearing an enemy attack, which took a toll on many of them. One revealed the "nervous strain under which we labor" and explained that he needed tobacco to calm his anxiety. One of the primary causes of this "nervous strain" was living under the constant shadow of death. The men recognized that each day might be their last and a sense of impending

doom was ever present in their remarks. "We are certainly getting used to hardship," one man explained, "home will be paradise if we ever see it again."¹⁹ As the men faced sudden death and the uncertainty that came with life at the front, they found ways to cope. Some took comfort in their faith and told of going to church and reading the Bible, clinging to its passages for comfort and strength. Others took solace in their fellow soldiers and many talked about the consolation that those bonds of friendship provided. Some sought comfort in thinking of their loved ones back home. Many men wrote tenderly to their mothers, wives, and sweethearts about their fears and troubles. Reed Harrison told his mother about losing his good friend: "George Palmer was killed the first time over the top . . . I saw him lying in front of the machine gun encampment," Harrison lamented. "That's the fortunes of war," he painfully concluded.²⁰

When the call came for the men to go into battle, there was no escape from war's harsh realities. In the moments just before going into action the men were on edge. "The air seemed electrified and our nerves were tense and taut . . . [as we] waited for 'the moment [to begin the charge toward the German lines],'" one man explained. Another doughboy, knowing he might not return, used the moments just before he faced the German artillery to say goodbye and good luck to a friend. When the time arrived to go "over the top," the men experienced both the noise and chaos of battle. "I shall never forget the sensation that came over me when I climbed out of the trench," one soldier explained, "this going over the top surely puts the test to a man." Another explained, "When the 'zero hour' came for the bombardment to start, there was an awful noise and the sky was lit up as bright as day. Guns of every caliber were shooting from everywhere," he concluded. Another described the chaos of battle: "the noise was deafening and the ground shook. There were guns around us whose presence we had not even guessed belching fire and destruction . . . They roared, they rang out, they cursed, they sang. Between flashes I could see my own gun crew their faces drawn and white working like machines. No one said a word, for it was useless, a human voice could not be heard above the infernal roar. One could look down the line and see nothing but stabs of flame in the darkness."²¹

Enduring the horrors of war created intense emotions. In reflective moments many men confessed their fears. Reed Harrison confided to his wife in an emotional letter that the "Huns were throwing over shells all the time and the shrapnel

was whistling everywhere and I thought my time had come.... I certainly for once know what fear is and am not ashamed to say that I was scared stiff." He went on to explain, "I did not realize it at the time but when. . . I looked back and saw what I had gone through, the feeling was awful." These men were not just fearful of their own death, but watching friends die on the battlefield also took an emotional toll.²² When one man found his fallen friend's body, it was "the strangest feeling I ever had." Another man was devastated when one of the soldiers in his unit was killed, and he related to his parents everything they had been through together. When the doughboys talked about their fallen brothers, they always told of the dead soldiers' bravery. In writing to a fallen Grand Island man's parents, Oscar Roeser explained that their son had been brave and led the charge against the Germans. He also told them that "he did not suffer the least bit" when he died, and assured them that their son had been given a nice burial alongside several other men from his company. When one man reflected on all the death he had seen in battle he simply called it "the worst [thing] I have ever witnessed."²³

Experiencing war's death and destruction changed these men. They hated the enemy far more than those men who never saw battle. "They [the Germans] are a dirty lot and look more like savages and were very ignorant," one combat


soldier explained. Another said the Germans were "evil," and still another described them as "bewildered, bedraggled looking creatures" that used underhanded tactics. Many men wanted vengeance for the death and destruction the enemy had wrought. After being badly wounded, one soldier told his mother that he wanted to get back to the front lines to "kill as many [Germans as] I can get my hands on and now I won't take any prisoners . . . They ought to be killed." Other wounded men expressed this same desire to get back into battle to kill the Germans. "I am beginning to fret and fume to get back to the [front] line again—where the best is the worst, and there ain't no ten commandments," Jack Sutherland angrily asserted. While some men expressed the desire to wreak vengeance on the Huns, others just wanted the killing to end. "I wish the war was over," one wounded man explained, "so the rest of the boys wouldn't get hurt." These battle experiences psychologically damaged these men and some recognized how the war had changed them. One man said it would be "hard to settle down to civilization again." Another confessed that he longed for the thrill of battle. Battle, he explained "really is the greatest game in the world and a great sport. Baseball games and motion pictures will be too tame for me after this." Still another related that combat had "become second nature to him" and he worried that once

World War Memorial, in Memorial Park, Grand Island, Neb.



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he returned home he might be walking down the street of Grand Island and hear a tire burst, which would make him dive for cover and “go crazy looking for a gas mask.” George Coates observed the mental scars carried by a battle-hardened sergeant. After spending some time with the sergeant, Coates concluded that he was physically fit, “but mentally and morally he would be better off buried in No Man’s Land.”²⁴

On November 11, 1918, the day these men had longed for finally arrived; the Germans were defeated and the war was over. They reported the celebrations that took place all over Europe. One told of the hubbub in Italy as the entire nation stopped to celebrate; another reported fireworks in France. The Hall County doughboys were also elated. One called the armistice “the happiest day in the world for us boys.” Another said, “we surely had a real Thanksgiving and so many things to be thankful for, especially this year, because peace is now sure and a victorious one too.” While the men celebrated, they also considered their postwar lives. Some thought their wartime experiences would benefit them. They believed they had met people and developed skills that would advance their careers. Some wondered, however, whether there would be a place for them in postwar Grand Island. “It has been practically one year since I left G.I. and what little [business success] I had is now shot to pieces,” Harold Prince lamented. “Begin[ning] over again will be the order of the day. The young men who have stayed home I presume have corralled [all] the business. To break in again will take a sledge hammer and crowbar,” he worried. While Prince was concerned about his and the other veterans’ place in postwar America, he and his fellow soldiers mostly just longed to return home. “If you want to see some homesick boys, come to France,” Prince told his family shortly after the war ended. “They may show us their finest cities, their most beautiful girls . . . they may take us to the prettiest parts of Europe and treat us fine, but take me back to Grand Island. Rather would I walk the streets of G.I. than to tread the Grand Boulevard of the Champ d’Elysees of Paris . . . Rather would I gaze upon the charms of the Nebraska queens, then upon the proudest beauties of Arlon [a city in Belgium]. . . . [B]ring out my civilian clothes . . . place a chair at the dining table for . . . your wandering son is coming home.”²⁵ 

NOTES

¹ Harold Prince to Unknown, Apr. 4, 1918, in the *Daily Independent* [Grand Island, Nebraska] Apr. 30, 1918 [hereafter, “DI.”]

² It should be noted that some of the men did not want their letters to appear in the paper, but they were still published. One man urged his mother not to allow his letter to be printed in the newspaper, but she did not listen and the letter appeared in the *DI* with the man’s objection clearly stated. Ernest Meyer to Mother, Aug. 13, 1918, *DI*, Sept. 9, 1918.

³ Harold Prince to Folks, Jan. 11, 1918, *DI*, Feb. 23, 1918; Author Unknown to Unknown, Dec. 13, 1917, *DI*, Dec. 17, 1917; J. Ross Moore to Dad and Mother, undated, *DI*, Sept. 2, 1918; Fred Kruse to Sister, May 30, 1918, *DI*, June 28, 1918.

⁴ “Let Us Have But One Aim,” Editorial, *DI*, Apr. 4, 1917.

⁵ James C. Olson and Ronald C. Naugle, *History of Nebraska*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, Third Edition, 1997), 285; August F. Buechler, Robert J. Barr and Dale D. Stough, *History of Hall County, Nebraska: A Narrative of the Past with Special Emphasis Upon the Pioneer Period of the County’s History, and Chronological Presentation of Its Social, Commercial, Educational, Religious, and Civic Development from the Early Days to the Present Time, and Special Analysis of Its Military and Civil Participation in the Late World War* (Western Publishing, Hall County, NE, 1920), 454. Eighty-six percent of Nebraska men who entered the military in World War I served in the army. The editors of the *DI* sometimes provided branch of service of the letter’s author, however, many times the service branch information was incomplete or omitted entirely. Therefore since most Nebraska men served in the army, I will assume throughout the study that the letter’s author was a soldier unless information was provided that indicates that man served in the Navy or Marines Corps. In those case where I know the man was a sailor or marine, I will note this in the text.

⁶ David Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 205, 217; John Pettegrew, *Brutes in Suits: Male Sensibility in America, 1890-1930* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 242-45.

⁷ Michael Scott to Mr. C. A. Weir, Sept. 8, 1918, *DI*, Oct. 1, 1918; Albert C. O’Field to Mother and All, July 25, 1918, *DI*, Aug. 6, 1918; George Coates to Father, July 24, 1918, *DI*, July 30, 1918; Harry A. Bulliss to Dad and Sis, July 22, 1918, *DI*, Sept. 3, 1918; G. A. Longaker to the Bee Hive Bunch, Mar. 18, 1918, *DI*, Apr. 23, 1918; Ed A. Fowlie to People, July 10, 1918, *DI*, Nov. 2, 1918.

⁸ Stanley Bartlett to “Bue” Sept. 30, 1917, *DI*, Oct. 3, 1917; Harold Prince to Unknown, Apr. 4, 1918, *DI*, Apr. 30, 1918.

⁹ Michael Scott to Mr. C. A. Weir, Sept. 8, 1918, *DI*, Oct. 1, 1918; John Koehler to Friend, Oct. 8, 1918, *DI*, Dec. 12, 1918; Stanley Bartlett to “Bue” Sept. 30, 1917, *DI*, Oct. 3, 1917; Olson and Naugle, *History of Nebraska*, 279-81; Buechler, Barr and Stough, *History of Hall County*, 444, 447-48, 460; Frank Van Nuys, *Americanizing the West: Race, Immigrants and Citizenship, 1890-1930* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2002), 51-52; “Tale Bearer Admits Fault,” *DI*, Feb. 12, 1918; “Compelled To Do His Part,” *DI*, Apr. 28, 1918; “Council of Defense Has Hearing in Two Cases,” *DI*, May 6, 1918.

¹⁰ George Christoffersen, John C. Peterson, Ira Harshburger, Tom P. Piteren, William M. Powell, Floyd Gilbert, Henry Smith, and Harry Fulton to the editor, Aug. 11, 1918, *DI*, Aug. 14, 1918; Harold Prince to Unknown, Apr. 4, 1918, *DI*, Apr. 30, 1918.

¹¹ Roy Bryson to Aunt, Apr. 28, 1918, *DI*, June 10, 1918; Albert Lyle to Mother and Family, July 8, 1918, *DI*, July 15, 1918; Stanley Bartlett to "Bue," Sept. 30, 1917, *DI*, Oct. 3, 1917; Milford Kelso to Mother, Aug. 15, 1918, *DI*, Sept. 4, 1918; "In Camp with the Boys," *DI*, Dec. 14, 1917 [a report by an unnamed soldier sent directly to the *DI*]; Thomas Robotham to Folks, July 6, 1917 [*sic*], *DI*, July 17, 1918; Harry Hintz to Starr, Aug. 31, 1917, *DI*, Oct. 16, 1917.

¹² Kennedy, *Over Here*, 205-9.

¹³ Paul Garver to Ones at Home, undated, *DI*, Sept. 25, 1917; Talmage Smith to Editor, Sept. 9, 1917, *DI*, Sept. 12, 1917; Elmer Olson to folks, Feb. 27, 1918, *DI*, Mar. 5, 1918; Harry Mack to Dan, Jan. 20, 1918, *DI*, Feb. 22, 1918; Earl Dryer to folks, Nov. 26, 1918, *DI*, Jan. 1, 1919; Alfred [last name unknown] to Mother, Oct. 17, 1917, *DI*, Oct. 29, 1917; Fred McDermott to Mother, July 25, 1918, *DI*, Aug. 14, 1918.

¹⁴ Harold [last name unknown] to Folks, Dec. 16, 1917, *DI*, Jan. 22, 1918; Harvey Joslin to Grandpa, Sept. 1, 1918, *DI*, Oct. 5, 1918; William Carroll to Sis, Dec. 7, 1918, *DI*, Jan. 23, 1919; Ernie Meyer to Mother and Father, Jan. 30, 1918, *DI*, Mar. 6, 1918; Jens. [last name unknown] to Folks, [no day provided] April 1918, *DI*, May 11, 1918; G.A. Longaker to the Bee Hive Bunch, Mar. 18, 1918, *DI*, Apr. 23, 1918; Harold Menck to unknown, Sept. 1, 1918, *DI*, Oct. 18, 1918; Carl Goering to Cousin, Sept. 23, [1918], *DI*, Oct. 31, 1918; Albert Shoemaker to Mother and All, July 19, 1918, *DI*, Aug. 17, 1918; Edward Tagge to Mother, Aug. 3, 1918, *DI*, Sept. 10, 1918; Clarence Cole to Friend, Sept. 30, 1918, *DI*, Nov. 2, 1918; Maurice Reed to Sis, Nov. 6, 1918, *DI*, Dec. 5, 1918; Fred Kruse to sister, May 30, 1918, *DI*, June 28, 1918; Frank Ryder to Mother and Father, undated, *DI*, Sept. 12, 1918; George Sullivan to Friends, Sept. 12, 1918, *DI*, Nov. 29, 1918; Clarence Waffle to Mother, Oct. 9, 1918, *DI*, Nov. 29, 1918; Paul Schoning to Brother, Sister and little Niece, Sept. 7, 1918, *DI*, Dec. 16, 1918; Carl Peters to Father, June 9, 1918, *DI*, Aug. 8, 1918; Elmer Thompson to Folks, July 25, 1918, *DI*, Aug. 30, 1918.

¹⁵ Harold Prince to Folks, Dec. 31, 1917, *DI*, Feb. 20, 1918; George Coates to Father, July 24, 1918, *DI*, July 30, 1918; Howard Augustine to unknown, date unknown, *DI*, Sept. 14, 1917; George Sullivan to Friends, Sept. 10, 1918, *DI*, Nov. 5, 1918; William McShane to Mother and All, Nov. 9, 1918, *DI*, Dec. 16, 1918; Daniel Griffith to Mother and Sister, Aug. 31, 1918, *DI*, Sept. 28, 1918; Ray Hammond to Father, June 1, 1918, *DI*, July 10, 1918; Emil Stelk to Father, Mother and All, undated, *DI*, Aug. 27, 1918; R. L. Eddingfield to Parents and All, undated, *DI*, Sept. 19, 1918; Frank D. Ryder to Mother and Father, undated, *DI*, Sept. 12, 1918; Lawrence Quillin to Mother and All, July 19, 1918, *DI*, Aug. 17, 1918.

¹⁶ Claude Moore to Mother and Family, Aug. 11, 1918, *DI*, Sept. 2, 1918; Arthur Goodwin to Cousin, Oct. 5, 1918, *DI*, Nov. 16, 1918; Tracy Mumford to folks, Aug. 23, 1918, *DI*, Oct. 25, 1918; Bernard Dempsey to Folks, May 20, 1918, *DI*, June 28, 1918.

¹⁷ Jay Thompson to Mr. Hansen, Aug. 18, 1918, *DI*, Sept. 11, 1918; Harold Prince to *DI*, June 9, 1917, *DI*, June 14, 1917; Oscar Beekman to My Friends, Mar. 3, 1918, *DI*, Mar. 14, 1918; John Koehler, to Wife, Mother, Father, Aug. 10, 1918, *DI*, Sept. 14, 1918; Clarence Campbell to Mother and All, Nov. 5, 1918, *DI*, Dec. 12, 1918; Harry Nielsen to Folks, Oct. 18, 1918, *DI*, Nov. 29, 1918; Dec Bradstreet to Dear Wife, Sept. 26, 1918, *DI*, Nov. 8, 1918; Roy Kohl to Brother and Sis, Sept. 18, 1918, *DI*, Nov. 8, 1918; Oscar Roeser to Sister Ella, Sept. 25, 1918, *DI*, Oct. 26, 1918; Oscar Roeser to

Mr. Bradstreet, July 4, 1918, *DI*, Aug. 17, 1918; Harry Nielsen to Folks, undated, *DI*, Oct. 29, 1918; Edward Tagge to Mother, Aug. 3, 1918, *DI*, Sept. 10, 1918; Howard Augustine to Don Boehm, undated, *DI*, Nov. 2, 1917; William Johnson to Mother, Oct. 2, 1918, *DI*, Nov. 8, 1918; Lloyd Brown to Mother and Father, Oct. 2, 1918, *DI*, Nov. 2, 1918; G.A. Longaker to the Bee Hive Bunch, Mar. 18, 1918, *DI*, Apr. 23, 1918.

¹⁸ Oscar Roeser to folks at home, Sept. 24, 1918, *DI*, Oct. 23, 1918; Clay Schoonover to unknown, Aug. 26, 1918, *DI*, Oct. 3, 1918; Harold Hoyt to Folks, July 28, 1918, *DI*, Sept. 13, 1918; Oscar Roeser to Sister Elsa, Sept. 26, 1918, *DI*, Oct. 26, 1918; Reed Harrison to Dearest Sweetheart, Sept. 15, 1918, *DI*, Nov. 7, 1918; Roy Kohl to Brother and Sis, Sept. 18, 1918, *DI*, Nov. 8, 1918; Oscar Roeser to Mr. Palmer, Nov. 24, 1918, *DI*, Jan. 4, 1919; Max J. Harder to Father and Mother, Aug. 30, 1918, *DI*, Oct. 2, 1918; Howard Augustine to Mother and All, Aug. 13, 1918, *DI*, Sept. 16, 1918; Harold Prince to Folks, Oct. 24, 1918, *DI*, Nov. 30, 1918.

¹⁹ Harold Prince to Folks, Jan. 11, 1918, *DI*, Feb. 23, 1918; Harold Prince to folks, Dec. 31, 1917, *DI*, Feb. 20, 1918; William Johnson to Mother, Oct. 2, 1918, *DI*, Nov. 8, 1918; Tracy Mumford to Folks, Aug. 23, 1918, *DI*, Oct. 25, 1918; Howard Augustine to Mother and All, Aug. 13, 1918, *DI*, Sept. 10, 1918; Reed Harrison to Dearest Sweetheart, Sept. 15, 1918, *DI*, Nov. 7, 1918; Albert Martin to Friend, May 8, 1918, *DI*, June 17, 1918.

²⁰ Tracy Mumford to Folks, Aug. 23, 1918, *DI*, Oct. 25, 1918; Howard Augustine to Mother and All, Aug. 13, 1918, *DI*, Sept. 10, 1918; Reed Harrison to Dearest Sweetheart, Sept. 15, 1918, *DI*, Nov. 7, 1918; Reed Harrison to Mother, Sept. 17, 1918, *DI*, Nov. 5, 1918; Albert Martin to Friend, May 8, 1918, *DI*, June 17, 1918.

²¹ Jack Sutherland to Mr. Horth, Oct. 12, 1918, *DI*, Nov. 13, 1918; Oscar Roeser, to Mr. Palmer, Nov. 24, 1918, *DI*, Jan. 4, 1919; Oscar Roeser to Folks at Home, Sept. 24, 1918, *DI*, Oct. 23, 1918.

²² 1,566 Nebraska men died in World War I.

²³ Reed Harrison to Dearest Sweetheart, Sept. 15, 1918, *DI*, Nov. 7, 1918; Reed Harrison to Mother, Sept. 17, 1918, *DI*, Nov. 5, 1918; Paul Schoning to folks, Oct. 18, 1918, *DI*, Dec. 19, 1918; Oscar Roeser to Mr. Palmer, Nov. 24, 1918, *DI*, Jan. 4, 1919; William Hall to Friends, Sept. 9, 1918, *DI*, Oct. 28, 1918.

²⁴ Reed Harrison to Dearest Sweetheart, Sept. 15, 1918, *DI*, Nov. 7, 1918; Lloyd Brown to Mother and Father, Oct. 2, 1918, *DI*, Nov. 2, 1918; Fred Holmes to Mother and All, Sept. 29, [1918], *DI*, Nov. 30, 1918; Jack Sutherland to Mr. Horth, Oct. 12, 1918, *DI*, Nov. 13, 1918; Harold Hoyt to Folks, July 28, 1918, *DI*, Sept. 13, 1918; Jay Thompson to Mr. Hansen, Aug. 18, 1918, *DI*, Sept. 11, 1918; Leo McGrath to Sis, undated, *DI*, Sept. 21, 1918; Roy Bryson to Aunt, Apr. 28, 1918, *DI*, June 10, 1918; Harold Prince to Folks, June 2, 1918, *DI*, June 27, 1918; George Coates to Father, undated, *DI*, Sept. 12, 1918.

²⁵ Lloyd Thompson to Aimee and Folks, Oct. 10, 1918, *DI*, Nov. 16, 1918; Herman Schlichting to Folks, Nov. 12, 1918, *DI*, Dec. 18, 1918; Morrison Pierce to Mother, Nov. 13, 1918, *DI*, Dec. 19, 1918; Oscar Roeser to Mr. Bradstreet, Nov. 29, 1918, *DI*, Jan. 1, 1919; William Johnson to Mother, Nov. 24, 1918, *DI*, Jan. 9, 1919; Lloyd Thompson to Unknown, undated, *DI*, July 13, 1918; Harold Prince to Unknown, Apr. 4, 1918, *DI*, Apr. 30, 1918; Harold Prince to Folks, Nov. 30, 1918, *DI*, Jan. 17, 1919.