Hettinger County Letter 1

**Letters from The Great War**

*(EDITOR’S NOTE) Sgt. F.S. Montgomery wrote this letter Nov. 3, 1918 to his dad, G.W. Armstrong of Regent, ND. It was published in the* Regent Times *December 27, 1918.)*

Dear Dad:

We have the right to send a special letter to Dad, so will try and make yours as interesting as I can under the circumstances.

The day we left the States was a memorable one for Monte. From New York, had numerous sub-chasers on both sides, as far as you could see ahead and back of us, an observation balloon and air ship ahead of us. Everything went fine the first few days, a calm sea and no danger. Later, however, after nearing the danger zone somewhere off the coast of Greenland; one afternoon between 3 and 4 o'clock, was down in the hold when they started dropping "death bombs." We lost no time in reaching the deck as we were in dangerous waters and German subs had been reported by wire less. Our fleet consisted of 23 transports and our boat was the flag ship. Just as I reached the deck the gun on the left side of the ship took two shots at this sub and missed. The sub swung out ahead of us, coming in on our right. It was less than 200 yards and throwing water 2 feet over the periscope. Just as she started to raise to get our range the gun on our right barked, over my head as by this time was as close up to the bow of the ship leaning over the rail not wanting to miss anything, making a dead hit. There was a tremendous report, a horse-shoe circle of intense white heat, a red hot flame, then an inky black circle of smoke, nothing left to show where the sub had been but a foaming angry sea. It was a close shave, Dad, for had that shot missed he would have got us being so close. The same day our convoy got two more.

We did not take a direct course but zig-zaged. Passed a large ice-burg and near froze for a few days with over coats on.

For two days rode a rough sea, the waves breaking over the deck, and we had to stay below.

After landing at Liverpool, we stopped at a rest camp over night and started on our long trip thru England which is the most beautiful country out of doors. We landed away down in the southern part of France in one of the largest aviation camps in France.

We were there only a week when our company was sent to another large air camp. Was there six weeks. This camp is located just out of Paris. I was working in the heart of the city all the while we were there, in fact, this big gun the Huns were shooting into Paris some 70 miles hit just two blocks from where I located. I was there when the third daylight air raid was pulled off in Paris. After leaving there we moved to another camp about 20 miles back of the front. The Huns came over the several times and dropped their little bot balls of hell. One bolder than the rest came down over us one moonlight night and took a few shots at us with his machine gun. From there we moved still closer up and that's where the real fun began. Whenever we had a bright night you could figure on a visit from Fritzie.

One evening I was in the Y.M.C.A. and had just leaned back in a chair enjoying a good cigar just got one whiff of smoke, when "bang, bang" was heard. Was close to the door but by the time I reached the outside, he was dropping them fast and furious. I started running and if Old Tom of Dickinson could have seen me move he would have thought I could run. The only thing to do is to get in a ditch as these shells cut in all directions from the ground up, and I was headed for a ditch. Well I fell and a big long-legged fellow behind me ran the full length of me, stepping on my head. If he stepped on anything but air from then on, did not see it. I never felt him, that's how scared I was. When they came back the following evening we were ready for Fritz and sent up a barrage that beat any fire works in the world. We dropped two of the birds.

The sky is full of planes all day long, our planes of course, and the stunts they pull would make you hold your breath. An air plane here is as common as an auto ride there.

The big guns were pounding every night. We were as used to the noise as an auto trip over the roads there. Was lost in a truck at the front one night. It was raining and so dark it hurt. No lights of course. If we had run 20 minutes on the road we were headed, would have gone over the top of the truck. We stopped in a town lately shelled by the Germans. Not a soul around, all the buildings, were full of shell holes, and we ate our hard take and corned beef in range of the guns. One place we just left they gassed so you see we had a bit of excitement right along to keep us from growing homesick.

But can not tell you half of it, Dad. This will give you some of idea of the times we had, now it's all over, and we want to come home.

Nearly forgot to mention we anchored for two days at Halifax in the harbor where they had that big explosion and fire. One of the ships was showing some her nose above the water. We were seventeen days on the water. The ship that brought us over was a Brittish boat by the name of Saxonia.

Tell Bur the name of this long range gun that fired on Paris was Bertha, known as Old Bertha.

…

Sgt. F. S. Montgomery,

10th co. 4th Regt.

Air service Mec. Co.

Researched and transcribed by University of Mary history graduate, Marirose Tan.

Letters from The Great War is a project conducted by students of Dr. Joseph T. Stuart, associate professor of history at the University of Mary in Bismarck. Students researched archives at the North Dakota Heritage Center to provide transcripts for use by the North Dakota Newspaper Association and the North Dakota World War I Centennial Committee.