



Over There: A Doughboy in France 1918

William S. Shepard

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My father's notebook, kept carefully throughout his World War One service, is a treasured family keepsake. It was, however, rarely actually read, much less consulted for its first-hand account of his experiences on the Western Front. We all knew the basics, that he had been on the front lines on Armistice Day, November 11, 1918, and had recorded that fact. I transcribed that day's moving entry a few years back, and sent it to each of his grandchildren.

With the approach of the centennial of World War One, and America's entry in 1917, it seemed the right time to take a closer look at the notebook. I am glad that I did. It was written in pencil, but fortunately, during a period of convalescence, Dad had gone over much of it with pen and ink. He had also supplemented his notebook entries with more broadly focused memos, which gave depth and context to his earlier notebook entries, when the writer was mindful of security restrictions. Gradually, as the weeks passed, the handwriting became more familiar. The outlines of the story, how Dad enlisted, trained at Fort Devens, Massachusetts with his 301st Signal Corps Field Battalion, and then went to France were becoming familiar. The larger story was fascinating, including their naval convoy across the U-Boat infested North Atlantic, from Halifax, Nova Scotia, to Great Britain, and passage across the Channel.

Then came the eastward movement through a rail and training network largely laid out by General Pershing in 1917 across France to the eastern sector, which was to become the American Sector, in Meurthe-et-Moselle, Lorraine. That is where Dad's journey led, to an isolated and rocky hill on the Moselle named Mousson Hill, and combat with the American Sixth Corps. It was the time of the St. Mihiel Salient, and the Meuse-Argonne Offensive.

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