



4-2004

MS-053: Charles D. Ryan, 66th Engineers

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MS-053: Charles D. Ryan, 66th Engineers

Description

The collection consists primarily of letters from Charles Ryan to Elizabeth Dooling, his wife-to-be. The letters to Elizabeth begin on March 29, 1918 and the final one in the collection is dated June 3, 1919. The only other items in the collection is an envelope addressed to Elizabeth Dooling from Charles Ryan, a newspaper clipping of Ryan's marriage to Elizabeth, a blank postcard with two soldiers on the front, and a letter to Ryan from the Treasury Department.

Although Ryan briefly mentions significant events, such as Germany being defeated and Italy leaving the Peace Conference, his letters focus largely on the mundane tasks of camp life. He constantly comments on how one never knows what to expect with the army: "here to-day and gone to-morrow," and continuously asserts, "Sherman was right, 'War is ----.'" While it may not be extremely helpful to the military historian looking for an individual's experience in battle, the collection does serve as a window into the soldier's mind who is bored with the soldier's life and eager to return home.

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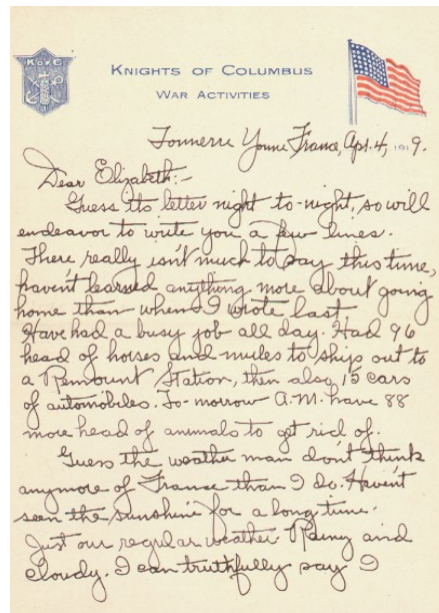
Keywords

World War I, WWI, 66th Engineers, 20th Grand Division, veteran, soldier, camp life, army life, Knights of Columbus

Disciplines

European History | History | Military History | Social History | United States History

Guide to Charles D. Ryan, 66th Engineers



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Special Collections & College Archives

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April 2004

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Provenance: Purchased from dealer.

Biography: Charles Daniel Ryan began his military career at Camp Devens in Ayer, Massachusetts approximately one hundred miles away from his future wife, Elizabeth Marion Dooling, who was in North Adams, Massachusetts. He spent a month in this location before heading south to Camp Laurel in Maryland, where he was placed in Company B of the 66th Engineers Regiment. After two months of drill and work, Ryan and his regiment were shipped, as he stated, “over the pond” to France, where he spent the next ten to eleven months. Mid-December of 1918 he wrote to Elizabeth that he was now in the 20th Grand Division. Following his return to the states Ryan married Miss Elizabeth Dooling. The newspaper clipping that announced their wedding stated that Ryan was a “member of North Adams council, Knights of Columbus” and worked at the North Adams post office.

Scope and Content Notes: The collection consists primarily of letters from Charles Ryan to Elizabeth Dooling, his wife-to-be. The letters to Elizabeth begin on March 29, 1918 and the final one in the collection is dated June 3, 1919. The only other items in the collection is an envelope addressed to Elizabeth Dooling from Charles Ryan, a newspaper clipping of Ryan’s marriage to Elizabeth, a blank postcard with two soldiers on the front, and a letter to Ryan from the Treasury Department.

Although Ryan briefly mentions significant events, such as Germany being defeated and Italy leaving the Peace Conference, his letters focus largely on the mundane tasks of camp life. He constantly comments on how one never knows what to expect with the army: “here to-day and gone to-morrow,” and continuously asserts, “Sherman was right, ‘War is ----.’” While it may not be extremely helpful to the military historian looking for an individual’s experience in battle, the collection does serve as a window into the soldier’s mind who is bored with the soldier’s life and eager to return home.

Folder 1: Inventory

Folder 2: Letters to Elizabeth Dooling d. March 29 – April 30, 1918

Camp Devens, Ayer Massachusetts, March 29, -18 (7:40 PM); medical examinations, being in “quarentine;” 4 pp.

Camp Devens, Ayer, Massachusetts, March 29, 1918 (9 PM); “...am now a regular Soldier;” 1 p.

Camp Devens, Ayer Massachusetts, 4/1/18 (6:30 PM); colored troops, inspections, thanks Elizabeth for box of candy; 2 pp.

Camp Devens, Ayer Massachusetts, April 3, 1918 (6:20 PM); “One thing in the army you never see is sugar or milk,” reported to “A” platoon, hard work; 5 pp.

Camp Devens, Ayer Massachusetts, April 5 –’18 (8:45 PM); continually encourages

- Elizabeth to write, 2nd “innoculations” tomorrow – just got over the sore arm from the last one, monotony of camp life; 2 pp.
- Camp Devens, Ayer Massachusetts, April 7, 1918 (8 PM); inspection requirements; enjoy seeing the men in prayer at mass, thanks Elizabeth for her fudge; 2 pp.
- Camp Devens, Ayer Massachusetts, April 10, 1918 (6:45 PM); “Army life is one uncertain game,” boxing; 4 pp.
- Camp Devens, Ayer Massachusetts, April 11, 1918; sending a picture, strong winds and dust, talk of transfer; 2 pp.
- Camp Devens, Ayer Massachusetts, April 13, 1918; laundry description, clerical duties, vaccinated twice but didn’t work, pondering the next draft; 2 pp.
- Camp Devens, Ayer Massachusetts, April 16, 1918; in the field all day, might be transferred, shipped home civilian clothing, death of Louis Noel; 2 pp.
- Camp Devens, Ayer Massachusetts, April 18, 1918; wants a pass, “it matters little what your opinion is” in the army, theater, shortage of time; 2 pp.
- Camp Devens, Ayer Massachusetts, April 22, 1918; got to visit on Sunday, received ID medals, new appreciation of mothers and home; bread wagon; 4 pp.
- Camp Laurel, Maryland, April 26, 1918; trip to Maryland – Red Cross served hot coffee, cheered on by citizens entire trip down, camp life, placed in Co. B. 66th Reg. Engineers, lecture from English officer about condition in Europe, Major General said they are headed for France soon; 4 pp.
- Camp Laurel, Maryland, April 28, 1918 (Sunday, 1:20 PM); (typed) “we will be mighty glad to take the place of the pigs...,” shaving, wants mail; 2 pp.
- Camp Laurel, Maryland, April 30th, 1918 (8 PM); worked in Captain’s tent typing payroll, stole a candle from Captain’s tent, few draftees in camp; 4 pp.

Folder 3: Letters to Elizabeth Dooling d. May 6 – May 31, 1918

- Postcard p.d. May 6; front picture: “Say! I’d like to surround you – and bombard you with kisses.”
- Camp Laurel, Maryland, May 6, 1918 (7:40 PM); got a ride to Baltimore, promoted to First Class Private & acting Corporal, funeral for a soldier killed in OK; 4 pp.
- Camp Laurel, Maryland, May 7, 1918 (8:20 PM); got paid \$11.30 after insurance & money sent to mother, heard to be sent to France June 1st, sent an Engineer button; 4 pp.
- Camp Laurel, Maryland, May 8, 1918 (6 PM); guarding water tank, baseball game on Sunday (Co. B vs. Co. A), company picture taken, might march to Washington to be reviewed by President Wilson & Secretary of War Baker; 6 pp.
- Camp Laurel, Maryland, May 13, 1918 (8:30 PM); got to visit cousins in Washington, 66th Engineers at full-strength; 2 pp.
- Camp Laurel, Maryland, May 14, 1918 (9:10 PM); skipped work to write, guard lumber tonight; 2 pp.
- Camp Laurel, Maryland, May 15, 1918 (9:10 PM); built a coatrack, sold civilian shoes for \$1.00; 2 pp.
- Camp Laurel, Maryland, May 17, 1918 (7:45 PM); packed tightly in tents, sent picture of

- the company, might move to Mineola, L.I. or NYC before going “over the pond;”
4 pp.
- Camp Laurel, Maryland, May 20, 1918 (7 PM); stacked wood, rumors in camp about moving out; 4 pp.
- Camp Laurel, Maryland, May 22, 1918 (6:45 PM); overseas equipment arrived, conflicted about telling mother about orders, bunkies are playing music & poker games; 3 pp.
- Camp Laurel, Maryland, May 27, 1918; optimistic view of defeating the Germans; 2 pp.
- Camp Laurel, Maryland, May 31, 1918; should be moving soon, got a wool suit, new recruits keep arriving; 4 pp.

Folder 4: Letters to Elizabeth Dooling d. June 3 – June 27, 1918

- Camp Laurel, Maryland, June 3, 1918; “non-coms school,” went swimming; 4 pp.
- Camp Laurel, Maryland, June 5, 1918; officially made Corporal, comments on German submarines sinking 8 vessels off Jersey Coast; 3 pp.
- Camp Laurel, Maryland, June 10, 1918; more talk of moving, regimental dance, visited cousins in Washington; 2 pp.
- Camp Laurel, Maryland, June 12, 1918; thinks Navy boys have it good – will never see service, leaving soon, everyone is writing letters, speaks of duty; 3 pp.
- Camp Laurel, Maryland, June 13, 1918; “Time flies by in the army...,” regimental parade; 2 pp.
- Camp Laurel, Maryland, June 17, 1918; went to church, describes his “fine supper;” 3 pp.
- Camp Laurel, Maryland, June 20, 1918; lots of drill & work, no news on moving; 3 pp.
- Camp Laurel, Maryland, June 20, 1918; packed up today, went to Confession & Communion Sunday; 2 pp.
- Camp Laurel, Maryland, June 21, 1918; skipped drill to write, describes buttons, restrictions on writing; 3 pp.
- Camp Laurel, Maryland, June 24, 1918; getting ready to go over; 2 pp.
- Camp Laurel, Maryland, June 27, 1918; all packed up & about to move out, special mass this morning, last letter in USA?; 1 p.

Folder 5: Letters to Elizabeth Dooling d. July 17 – August 31, 1918

- July 17, 1918; “Am now in a town called [hole where name was cut out]...,” adjusting to France, praises the Red Cross; 1 p.
- Somewhere in France, July 23, 1918; town name scratched away, describes French trains, wants papers from home to keep up on the local news, not allowed to write much info back; 4 pp.
- Somewhere in France, July 29, 1918; keep writing; went into St. Nazaire on pass, desires some of Elizabeth’s fudge; 4 pp.
- Postcard p.d. July 30, 1918; doing well – busy.
- Somewhere in France, July 30, 1918; thanks Elizabeth for her letters, encourages her to call on his mother, describes the French town; 7 pp.
- Somewhere in France, August 1, 1918; General Pershing’s Lecture, 3 ½ francs = .70

cents; 5 pp.
Somewhere in France, August 4, 1918; Knights of Columbus (K of C) building; 4 pp.
Somewhere in France, August 7, 1918; a soldier received a package forwarded – his cake was spoiled; 3 pp.
France, August 11, 1918; show at YMCA tent, no mail in over a week; 3 pp.
France, August 14, 1918; got mail, “No, we don’t care for the French girls overhere,” another YMCA show; 3 pp.
France, August 16, 1918; people at home haven’t received his letters; 3 pp.
France, August 22, 1918; mail extremely important to all soldiers, visited the dentist, newspapers speak optimistically of the war; 3 pp.
Somewhere in France, August 25, 1918; Hoover lifted meat ban; 3 pp.
France, August 27, 1918; sending a silk handkerchief; 3 pp.
France, August 31, 1918; received letter; 3 pp.

Folder 6: Letters to Elizabeth Dooling d. September 1 – October 27, 1918

France, Sept. 1st, 1918; childhood friend killed; 3 pp.
France, Sept. 9th, 1918; has moved; 4 pp.
France, Sept. 12, 1918; waiting on mail, checks on home; 3 pp.
France, Sept. 17, 1918; after a month of not getting mail “I’ll give up looking for anymore mail,” found wild blackberries, working on learning French; 3 pp.
France, Sept. 18, 1918; “Last night I received fifteen letters,” asks about American news, Allies are doing well; 3 pp.
France, Sept. 23, 1918; beautiful roads in France, change in post office #; 3 pp.
France, Sept. 28, 1918; “war news looks fine these days all right;” 3 pp.
France, Oct. 1, 1918; proud of the US army’s progress: “leave it to Uncle Sam,” explains French money, change in address; 3 pp.
France, Oct. 4, 1918; inquires about receipt of handkerchief, cannot answer one of her questions; 3 pp.
France, Oct. 27, 1918; thanks Elizabeth for cigarettes, enclosing a picture, difficulty in obtaining coal, Elizabeth received the handkerchief; 3 pp.

Folder 7: Letters to Elizabeth Dooling d. November 1 – December 26, 1918

France, Nov. 1st, 1918; spent 2 weeks in the hospital with the “grippe,” movies being closed at home; 3 pp.
Somewhere in France, November 5th, 1918; Austria and Turkey have left “Germany to fight it out alone;” 3 pp.
Somewhere in France, November 11th, 1918; received news of uncle’s death, sent presents for Christmas, “Germany is done for;” 3 pp.
France, November 17, 1918; Spanish Flu killing “a great many people in the States,” wondering when he’ll be sent home since Germany is defeated; 4 pp.
France, Nov. 25, 1918; lack of entertainment (movies); 4 pp.
Somewhere in France, November 28, 1918; (typed) describes his Thanksgiving dinner, smoking has doubled in the army; 2 pp.
St. Florentin, France, Dec. 15, 1918; spent previous day in Paris – President Wilson was

there; 3 pp.

St. Florentin, France, Dec. 18, 1918; had a letter sent to mother returned to him by girl in Ohio – mail system not working well, now in the 20th Grand Division, no word of returning home; 3 pp.

St. Florentin, France, 12/23 1918; moving – no longer will be 66th Engineers, will not be returning home for awhile; 4 pp.

Tonnerre, France, Dec. 26, 1918; cold weather; 3 pp.

Folder 8: Letters to Elizabeth Dooling d. January 2 – February 23, 1919

Tonnerre, France, January 2, 1919; job duties, learned enough French to survive; 3 pp.

Tonnerre, France, January 12, 1919; received gold service stripe for being in France 6 months; 3 pp.

Tonnerre, France, January 15, 1919; got his gold stripe for 6 months duty in France; 3 pp.

Tonnerre, France, January 19th, 1919; still no word on coming home; 4 pp.

Tonnerre Yonne, France, Jan. 28, 1919; washing disaster, “Don’t know what we would have done overhere if it weren’t for getting letters from the folks back home,” traveling in the army; 3 pp.

Tonnerre, France, Feb. 6th, 1919; 80th Division Horseshow; 3 pp.

France, Feb. 12/’19; work is his “amusement;” 2 pp.

France, February 16th, 1919; duty seven days a week keeps him from attending church, inconsistency of mail service, Napoleon prison in Brest; 3 pp.

France, February 20th, 1919; attempted murder of French Premier, M. Clemenceau; 3 pp.

France, February 23rd, 1919; found a French lady to do his laundry; 3 pp.

Folder 9: Letters to Elizabeth Dooling d. March 3 – April 27, 1919

France, March 3, 1919; some men from his Regiment were sent to Russia; 5 pp.

France, March 9, 1919; 36th Division transferring men to their old divisions, a field clerk got severely cut up by the Paris Express – gruesome sights are no longer a problem, heard Margaret Wilson sing, soldiers box and wrestle during freetime, France does not compare with US; 5 pp.

France, March 12, 1919; re-mentions the clerk getting cut up into hundreds of pieces, lack of street lights in France; 4 pp.

France, March 21, 1919; nine months in France, exhausted from working 7 days/week; 4 pp.

Tonnerre Yonne, France, March 23, 1919; (typed) paper states that War Department wants to get them home, discusses heaviness of pack; 1 p.

Tonnerre Yonne, France, March 25, 1919; have not received mail in three weeks, ready for home, tired of work; 5 pp.

Tonnerre Yonne, France, March 27, 1919; Jack Merritt – “Scotch comedian from No. Adams” – showed up with the YMCA entertainment, second person from home met overseas, 4 pp.

France, March 30, 1919; newspaper clipping from March 27th of Pershing discussing job

situation for soldiers back home included; had to watch 80th march through on their way to head back to States; 3 pp.
Tonnerre Yonne, France, April 4, 1919; some from his Regiment were sent to Russia; 4 pp.
Tonnerre, France, April 7, 1919; men being sent home who got to France after him; 4 pp.
Tonnerre Yonne, France, April 14, 1919; (typed) Post Office left with the First Army Corps & 53rd Pioneer Infantry, loading up animals to ship back; 1 p.
April 20, 1919; Easter Sunday, went to mass; 4 pp.
Tonnerre Yonne, France, April 25, 1919; (typed) Italy possibly dropping out of the Peace Conference in Paris; 1 p.
Tonnerre Yonne, France, April 27, 1919; mentions Italy again, only Military Police, a Bakery Co., and a Camp Hospital left; 4 pp.

Folder 10: Letters to Elizabeth Dooling d. May 2 – June 3, 1919

Tonnerre Yonne, France, May 2nd, 1919; (typed) talk of getting shipped back late May or early June, illness in camp; 1 p.
Tonnerre (Yonne), France, May 7th, 1919 (7 P.M.); (typed) shipping everyone out – “there won’t be an American soldier left in Tonnerre,” ponders adjusting back to civilian life; 1 p.
St. Florentin, Yonne, May 19, 1919; (typed) furlough at Chateau-Thierry, visited battlefields & American cemeteries (lists names of graves for Co. M, 104th Infantry), mentions Regimental band; 1 p.
St. Florentin, Yonne, May 28, 1919; (typed) police duty, ponders home life & job; 1 p.
St. Florentin, Yonne, June, 3rd, 1919; (typed) talk of home, French economy affected; 1 p.

Folder 11: Miscellaneous

Envelope from Ryan to Elizabeth Dooling; p.d. Feb. 22, 1919.
Newspaper clipping announcing the marriage of Charles Ryan & Elizabeth Dooling.
Black postcard with picture of 2 soldiers on front.
Letter to Ryan from Charles L. Burrill, Treasurer & Receiver-General of the Treasury Department, The Commonwealth of Massachusetts, returning Ryan’s discharge papers & explaining procedure for receiving claims; d. September 18, 1919; 1 p.