



U.S.S. Agamemnon, docking at Hoboken, N.J., carrying victorious returning American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) in March 1919.

Doughboys on donkey-cart at Lucey, France; Aug. 17, 1918.



It's time out for a haircut at Baccarat, France; May 15, 1918.



Army Signal Corpsmen test communications to front lines in France; Sept. 28, 1918.



American gunners fire at German planes in Villers Tournelle, May 20, 1918.

OVER THERE

Story by Julia Wallis
Photos courtesy of Dolores Quinton

In a time when America seems destined for yet another conflict on foreign soil, it seems ironic that the First World War of 1914-1918 was touted in its day as the "war to end all wars."

Today, it is said that the sharp hand-eye coordination needed by our bombers to use sophisticated weapons systems in 1991's Operation Desert Storm had already been honed in childhood Nintendo sessions. In comparison, the tools and methods of war used in the muddy fields of 1918 France seem lumbering and awkward to us now (though current talk of gas masks and chemical warfare seem eerily familiar). The U.S. began playing its part "over there" in June 1917.

The photographs you see in this layout are from a scrapbook belonging to Dolores Quinton, contract specialist for Southern Division, Naval Facilities Engineering Command. Quinton is originally from Staten Island, N.Y., where her family once owned a partitioned house in which an elderly man rented an apartment.

When the man could no longer live alone, says Quinton, "he moved to the Navy Home in Philadelphia, but left us a scrapbook full of old photos from WWI, along with some cameras from that era." Being very young at the time, Dolores only remembers that the man's name was Francis J. LeBeau, but does not know how he came about possessing the pictures. It seemed clear, though, from the circumstances, that he must have once been a military member.

A closer inspection in the corners of several of the photos has revealed a tiny imprint of the U.S. Army Signal Corps insignia.

The Signal Corps, part of the Army since the Civil War, was made up of skilled soldier-operators of communications/electronics equipment, as well as troops to supply and distribute the equipment, install it, and attend to its maintenance and repair.

One aspect of the Corps' tasks during WWI, apparently, was to document American Expeditionary Forces combat on the front lines through photography. Many people in civilian studios took commissions as Signal Corps officers. In fact, later, during WWII, Hollywood movie producers Colonel Darryl Zanuck and Major Frank Capra contributed their know-how to signal photographic companies, serving in every theater of combat, for the creation of training films.

Combat photography served the Army's information and intelligence needs during the WWI era, and if some of the photos here are any indication, it is easy to see why many lost their lives in the work.



A Salvation Army worker in La Hermerage, France, gets ready to distribute a tableful of doughnuts; Sept. 20, 1918.



American doughboys march through a small (unidentified) French town to a hearty welcome from the villagers.



General John J. Pershing, leader of the AEF, at headquarters in France, Sept. 12, 1918.