

Letters from the Boys

Wisconsin World War I Soldiers Write home

by Carrie A. Meyer

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Words from the Wisconsin boys manning the trenches

On the 100th anniversary of the arrival of the flood of American troops in Europe that would shift the tide of World War I in favor of the Allies, *Letters from the Boys* brings to life this terrible war as experienced by Wisconsinites writing home.

Technology had transformed the battlefield in alarming ways. Automatic rifles mowed down the young men who went "over the top" to attack enemy trenches; airplanes and improved artillery brought death unseen from miles away; terrifying clouds of poison gas choked and burned the European countryside; the internal combustion engine brought tanks to the battlefield for the first time and revolutionized the way troops deployed.

In the thick of it were young men from Wisconsin, caught up in geopolitical events half a world away. Professor Carrie A. Meyer combed through three newspapers in Green County, Wisconsin, to synthesize the letters from the boys into a narrative that is both unique and representative, telling the stories of several Green County boys, from preparing for war, to life among French families near the front, to the terror of the battlefield. Meyer gracefully removes the veil of obscurity and anonymity hanging over soldiers who participated in a war fought so long ago by great numbers of men, reminding us that armies are made of individuals who strove to do their part and then return to their families.

Carrie A. Meyer grew up on a farm in Illinois and served as a Peace Corps volunteer before completing her Ph.D. in economics at the University of Illinois. Since November 2000, she has focused her research on the history of the rural Midwest. This includes her book, *Days on the Family Farm*, published by the University of Minnesota Press in 2007. Her article "Wisconsin's Gas Engines" appeared in the *Wisconsin Magazine of History* in Spring 2016.

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