

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

"Thanksgiving 1917"

Carroll County Times article for 28 November 1993

By Jay A. Graybeal

The 1917 Thanksgiving holiday was observed quite differently around our county, in contrast to the prior year's celebration on the safe return of local national guardsmen from their service on the Mexican Border. Businesses and public buildings were closed as families gathered for a traditional dinner. Absent from many dining room tables, however, were servicemen and women on active duty with the armed forces. Most were still training in stateside camps but there was the expectation that many would soon be going overseas to the war zone. For their families, there were no illusions about the dangers they would face.

One week before Thanksgiving, Mrs. Richard Cooper of Hampstead received a comforting letter from Lawrence Wooden regarding her concerns as a mother of two sons, Pvt. Charles H., a Marine then training at Paris Island, S. C., for service in France and Edgar W. who later entered the service. Mr. Wooden was a family friend from Hampstead who was then working in Baltimore. His lengthy November 21st letter provides his patriotic and religious reasons why a mother should be proud that her sons were in the service but it also serves a reminder of the sacrifices made by those who remained at home. This letter is part of a collection of wartime letters written from Pfc. Charles H. Cooper to his family. The collection was recently donated by the writer's son, C. Elwood Cooper himself a former Marine who served and was wounded in combat.

My Dear Mrs. Cooper,

You will not be expecting to hear from me but you will pardon me if I write a letter, perhaps not a very short one, and I hope I can give you some words of cheer and comfort. I heard you had been worrying quite a little about Charley but I wish you could see it as I do. I think if you had heard some speakers whom I have heard in the past ten days you would feel differently about it all and would want to be a real partaker in the struggle to overcome the evil day that German despotism might be thrust upon us.

I walked down to see you last Sunday when I was up but you were all out. I was glad of it for your sake for I know of nothing that will help you to be brave and noble in a time of great trial as plenty of God's out-of-doors in bright weather and a mingling with friends outside the daily surroundings. I only wish I could do or say something to make your noble sacrifice come easier to you. I have heard the stories over and over again of the English and French mothers who have sent not only sons but husbands to the front in those days when there was but little chance of returning and they were so impressed with the righteousness of the cause that they learned to let them go without a tear and they do all kinds of service to take their places. It is a noble service and even more courageous than the part many of the men are taking. I would count it a privilege to have any part in putting a stop to the progress of the German armies and I often wish I was going with the young fellows to France. Not that I like to fight, or want to fight or that I think that war is right but it is to stop this one and prevent future wars that I would go and to stop the barbarous teachings of the German rulers, that would lead me on. I am like one lady who said she did not believe in war any more than she believed in cyclones or tornadoes but when they come it is no use trying to get out of the way of them. That is the way I feel. It is very

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plain that the German rulers had planned the war carefully and had certain things in view and deliberately started the whole thing and the way they have carried it on is enough to make anyone's blood boil. The outrages that they have not only permitted but have encouraged have been such that would put any heathen nation to shame and which would make any man with red blood want to bring them down to defeat. It must be stopped and I believe God is going to help us do it. I will be so proud of Charley if he can do a "bit" in bringing this to pass. I have no one dependent on me and if I could get away from here would certainly enlist in some line of the work and endeavor to do my part, God being my helper. I can hardly stand to see men taken from their families who are really needed at home. The unmarried ones ought to come first and if it all keeps up long enough maybe I can get in it yet.

I received a card from Charley today--says he is drilling all day long now and does not get much time to write. Then too there is not much different going on and I suppose it is hard for him to write much; it is the same all the time. He is working hard, which will do him lots of good, help him enjoy what he gets to eat and he will be like another man after a little. I used to camp out (for a year and more) and do my own washing and while it does not seem very nice some times I never felt better and got fatter all the time. I lived in a tent one winter and did all my work, slept, dressed, & bathed in there when the thermometer was below zero much of the time and I got to weighing heavier than I ever weighed. These fellows will get to be so strong that nothing will tire them. I am not so sure that Charley will get to France but if I was enlisted I would want to go there and do my part. Of course I would want to be trained before I went to the firing line but they will all get that--months of it. If the worst came to worst I would count it a life well spent and in a noble cause, tending Christ's Kingdom here on earth, by making it safe for a person to worship as his conscience dictates. I believe that if all the big countries were democracies it would be impossible for another war like this to occur as it could not be planned by a few rulers or leaders and have any nation back them up and do their fighting for them. In a republic like ours there would be no one to make secret agreements and plans for war & even if they did there would not be any army to back them up. There would be no such thing as an aggressive war but only wars of defense.

I hope, for your sake, for the sake of the rest of the family you can wholly trust to God to guide right and if you do that I am sure all will come out for the best. You no doubt feel that God is taking your boys from you while, I feel, that he only wants you to loan them to him for a time as he has loaned them to you. At all events this life is not the real objective and is only of a few days and with more or less trouble at best and if we could all keep our eyes on the real object in life we would not be so much disturbed about the things of this life when they do not go as we might desire. As Dr. Kirk said last Sunday night as week, God is looking down upon us as nations, fighting and trying to take advantage of each other very much as a lot of unruly children do while the parent looks on and knows that like the parent, He can step in at any time and set us right. It (the war) all seems terrible beyond anything one can describe but there is lots of good going to come from it all and I believe it is going to set men thinking about God and Right and make possible such steps in advance for the Kingdom as the world has never seen or dreamed of. It may not come in our time or our way but one lifetime is but a day in God's plan and we are not large enough to grasp the real meaning of things. We can only kneel and pray, "I am blind, Lord lead the way" as we sometimes do when death takes from us a friend or some unbearable sorrow overtakes us.

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I sympathize with you and the thousands of others who are in your place but I like to think of the higher, nobler, braver side and count it an honor to be able to give something in so great a cause. I pray God to comfort you and to help you be the brave mother that I am sure he would have you be and that you will be proud to be and I hope when these troubled times are over we can all sit down and rejoice together.

Yours Sincerely,
Lawrence Wooden

Photo Caption 1: Pvt. Charles H. Cooper, U. S. Marine Corps, Paris Island, S. C., c. August, 1917. Pvt. Cooper later served overseas with the 51st Co., 5th Marines, 2nd Infantry Division, A.E.F. He was partially disabled by a machine gun bullet wound in the right chest on October 4, 1918. Gift of C. Elwood Cooper, 1993.

Photo Caption 2: Pvt. Edgar W. Cooper, Co. C, 50th Engineer Regiment, c. June 1918. Pvt. Cooper enlisted in the U. S. Army in May 1918 and served a year overseas with the American Expeditionary Forces. Gift of C. Elwood Cooper, 1993.