

Raffle Prize – A WWI Soldier’s Cover & Letter

By John Walter

Raffle prize donations are solicited from members for each stamp club meeting. On May 27 I won a raffle prize that was a real surprise. It was a ratty looking cover with tears, missing sections, heavy fold along the top since it was an odd size and too tall for a regular cover sleeve.

But what a wonderful cover it turned out to be with an 8-page letter from a WWI soldier stationed in France in 1919. Here is the story where my research led me from the town it was addressed to and the easily read letter which was still was in very good shape.



The cover was sent by Capt. Roy H. Parkinson, M.C., A.R.C.M.H. (American Red Cross Military Hospital) #3, A.P.O. 702. The corner card already had preprinted American Red Cross, Paris.

Notice the A.E.F Passed Censor in the lower left. Capt. Parkinson censored his own letter.

It was also endorsed for free mailing as “Officer Mail.” Usually the A.E.F mail I have seen has the “Soldier Mail” for the free mailing.

There is no postmark on the front or rear of the cover.

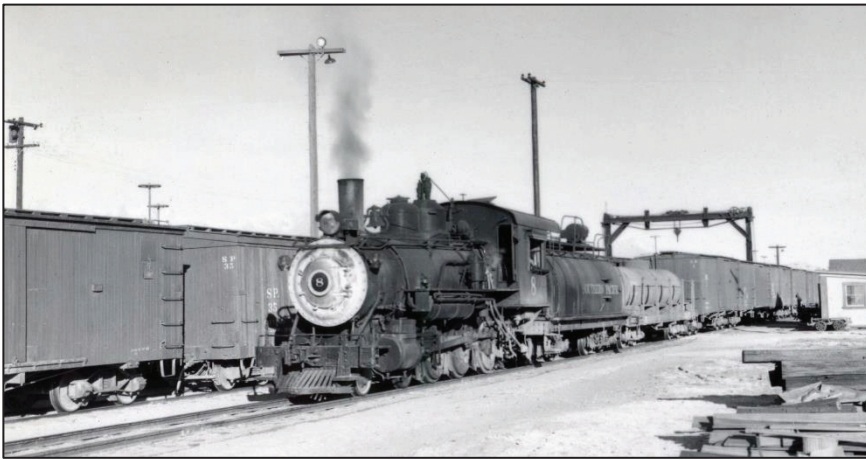
The cover was sent to Owenyo, California. The town was located in Inyo

County, about 5 miles north of Lone Pine. It’s claim-to-fame is the location on the Southern Pacific Railroad and in 1911 a big ceremony took place for the joining of the two branches of the Southern Pacific – the standard-gauge “Jawbone” (Owenyo) Branch and the narrow-gauge Owens Valley Branch. The town was abandoned in the 1960s, and all that remains are a few building foundations. It is a ghost town.

Now to a local connection. The Carson & Colorado Narrow Gauge Railroad line ran along the east side of Owens Valley with stops in small towns and mining camps. The railroad was built from Mound House, Nevada to Keeler, CA. By 1900 the Carson & Colorado was sold to Southern Pacific which then shifted the northern terminus from Mound House to Fallon, NV. In 1910, Southern Pacific built the new standard gauge line north from Mojave, CA to Owenyo.



1911 photo of celebration joining both branches of narrow- and standard-gauge tracks. Tracks were actually side-by-side.

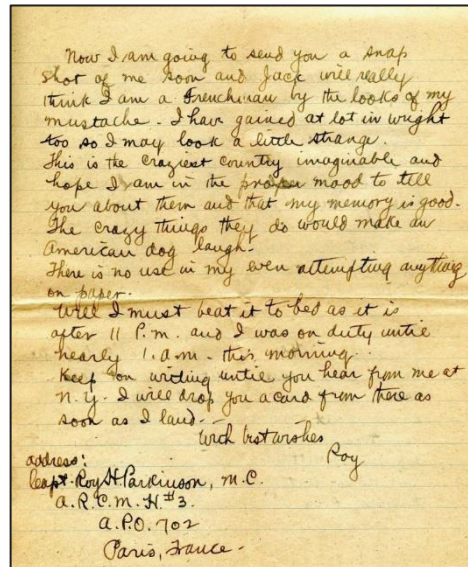
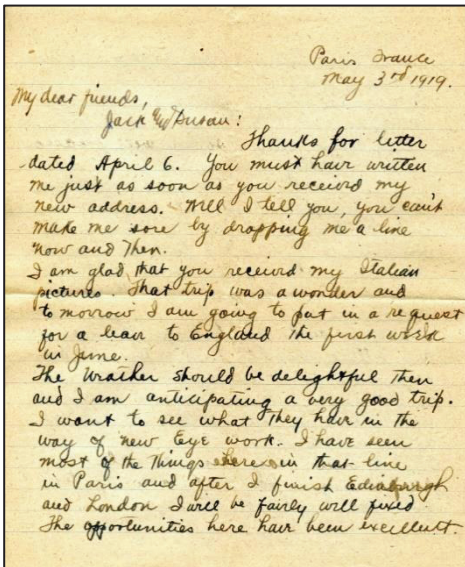


http://www.owensvalleyhistory.com/carson_n_colorado/page51d.html

One of the narrow-gauge steam locomotives built in 1907 and used on the Southern Pacific line was engine #8. This is the locomotive on display at Lillard Park, Sparks, in front of the Sparks Heritage Museum on Victorian Square since 1975. How about that.

Here is an undated photo of engine #8 in the Owenyo train yard.

I tried looking for Jack L. Rennick, the addressee, but could not find definitive information of an individual by that name in Owenyo.



Next is the letter from Capt. Parkinson. Here are images of the first and last pages.

I debated whether to include the 8-page letter but found it interesting. The letter is written and numbered on the first side, but both sides are used for a total of 8 pages.

Here is the entire letter:

Paris France
May 3rd 1919

My dear friends, Jack and Susan:

Thanks for letter dated April 6. You must have written me just as soon as you received my new address. Well I tell you, you can't make me sore by dropping me a line now and then.

I am glad that you received my Italian pictures. That trip was a wonder and tomorrow I am going to put in a request for a leave to England the first week in June.

The weather should be delightful then and I am anticipating a very good trip. I want to see what they have in the way of new eye(?) work. I have seen most of the things here in that line in Paris and after I finish Edinburgh and London I will be fairly well fixed. The opportunities here have been excellent and I have surely taken full advantage of them.

I have nearly finished the Louvre galleries and have taken in about 8 first class operas so am well pleased with my stay here.

I can not tell just how much longer I will be kept but feel that I will be one of the last to leave France. However it is intended to have all Americans off French soil by August and by the looks

of things I think they should easily succeed.

I shall be awfully glad for the French are getting mighty tired of us and are as anxious to get rid of us as we are to get away. We are now of no great use to them so they are through with us as we are of them.

This view may seem a little surprising to you but take the tip from one right on the ground.

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All officers and men coming back from the Army of Occupation in Germany have very favorable things to say about their treatment and the people there. Only just last night I admitted an officer just from there and I quizzed him pretty carefully and he agrees exactly with what others have said.

The people where he was billeted took just as good care of him as if he was their own son and when he left the young lady of the house promptly and apparently sincerely kissed him good bye. All of the boys are feeling very different and would much rather be billeted among the Germans than the French.

Peace had surely better be signed before we all get back or American public opinion may be changed in regard to Germany. Of course we know in many cases the treatment is to create a favorable American opinion but they have done more than just enough to create a favorable opinion.

I would not mind going up there for a short time say a month.

I am anxious to go to England for I like the English people very much. I was surely treated splendidly when I was over there in England last August.

I have some relatives of friends of mine waiting for me and anticipating my visit. Nearly all of our men or rather the officers are enthusiastic about them and I am awfully glad to see it. There is no reason for us to be jealous and envious of each others greatness rather we should both be glad and proud of each others good qualities.

America and Great Britain together can control the world so that the English speaking people have at last become supreme.

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The Latin races or rather nations are quite high strung and excitable. Another 1000 years from now will I feel see (sic) nearly the last of them.

It seems to me that they are going to go the route of the North American Indian. However that would conform to the general law of the rise and decay of races and nations.

The most remarkable examples being the Ancient Egyptians and Babylonians. The Greeks came nearly doing the same thing.

But it takes about 3000 to 3500 yrs for them to finally loose all trace of their ancient characteristics and form. Egypt under the Ptolemy was not the Egypt under the Pharaohs.

The last forceful Egyptians life was seen around 1200 to 1500 B.C. so that they have been extinct long enough to enable us to judge the amount of influence they actually had on the world. There is really no history more fascinating than that of Egypt. I am sorry that I will have to return home without having had the opportunity of visiting it.

However as soon as I make my home if I ever do I shall go there and study things a little in the actual ground. Italy was really a most enchanting country from the standpoint of the traveler

and historian. I must not get started off on Italy for I never would stop.

I guess I had better talk of something that is nearer home and that will be of more interest to you.

I am not terrible surprised to learn that Jack has the mountains in mind again. Jack those Alps in Franco Italian country were some mountains. However the yellow metal is particularly conspicuous by its absence but it is a rough country.

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Now C.L.D. Jones of Co E - 324 Inf comes my way I will classify him "D" and start him toward sunny Calif. Suppose he will never fall in my hands unless he is a Lieutenant or above in rank for this is an officers hospital and we have generals, colonels and majors here galore. General Pershing has not been here since I have been here but can tell how long it will be until he finally falls into our clutches.

I have not seen Pres. Wilson yet but Admiral Grayson his physician was out to one of the operations where I was yesterday. Here is where the celebrities come. I am surely lucky to get this assignment for the opportunities are surely great. There are any number of countesses giving us parties and dances but I have not attended any yet. However I will so pretty soon for I do not want to pass it up while I have the chance.

Now I am going to send you a snap shot of me soon and Jack I will really think I am a Frenchman by the looks of my mustache. I have gained a lot of weight too so I may look a little strange.

This is the craziest country imaginable and hope I am in the proper mood to tell you about them and that my memory is good. The crazy things they do would make an American dog laugh.

There is no use in my even attempting anything on paper.

Well I must beat it to bed as it is after 11 p.m. and I was on duty until nearly 1 a.m. this morning.

Keep on writing until you hear from me at N.Y. I will drop you a card from there as soon as I land.

With Best Wishes Roy

Address: Capt. Roy H. Parkinson, M.C.

A.R.C.M.H. #3

APO 702

Paris France.

As you can tell from the letter, Capt. Parkinson was a physician working at the American Red Cross Medical Hospital #3 in Paris. World War I began July 28, 1914, the U.S. entered the war April 6, 1917. The war ended November 11, 1918.

References:

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- Speck, Gary B., *Exploring a Ghost Railroad*, Nov. 2001. <https://freepages.rootsweb.com/~gtusa/history/usa/ca/ccrr.htm>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Owenyo,_California
- Strong, Mary Frances, *Owenyo - Where the Narrow Gauge Met the Standard*, Desert Magazine, July 1972, http://www.owensvalleyhistory.com/stories/exploring_a_ghost_railroad01.pdf
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southern_Pacific_8

John Walter collects U.S. used postal stationery, U.S. naval covers esp. hospital ships, Japan.