



*World War I Allied army hospital*

# “WITH THE TOMMIES”

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## A Kansas Nurse in the British Expeditionary Force, 1918: The Letters of Florence Edith Hemphill

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*by Doran L. Cart*

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**W**ith the United States entry into the First World War on April 16, 1917, the demand for nurses was immediate. Only a small cadre of U.S. Army Nurse Corps (ANC) personnel was available, thus the call went out. Florence Edith Hemphill answered. When she left for France in 1918, nurse Hemphill, who had brown hair and gray eyes, and stood five feet, seven inches and weighed 130 pounds, was embarking on the greatest adventure of her life. To share this experience with the folks at home, she wrote letters, many of which survive today.<sup>1</sup>

Born on February 28, 1887, in Wilson County, Florence Hemphill grew up in Chanute, the sixth of nine children. She completed her nurse's training at Christ's Hospital Training School in Topeka and went on to work as a private duty nurse prior to her wartime service.

Although Hemphill joined from private practice, American Red Cross nurses were the principal ANC reserve force, so when the call went out for nurses, it was aimed especially at them. In wartime Red Cross nurses could, by their consent, be assigned to active duty. They became subject to government regulations and also received the pay of a regular army nurse.

The first few hundred nurses slated for overseas service, during the formative period of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF), were assigned to service with the British Expeditionary Force (BEF). They were to serve at six base hospital units. By March 31, 1918, 2,088 American nurses had arrived in France, with more than 700 in British hospitals. On June 30, 1918, ANC nurses were distributed as follows: 755 with British forces, 3,323 with American forces, and 1,258 awaiting transportation or en route. Nurse Hemphill was in

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1. "Certificate of Identity" authorizing Florence Edith Hemphill to "Accompany the British forces in the Capacity of Nurse," U.S. War Department, January 18, 1918, Florence Edith Hemphill Collection, National World War I Museum, Kansas City, Mo.

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a supplementary group assigned to the British general hospitals in the Rouen area. Casual Group A, consisting of ninety-nine nurses, arrived in France in February 1918.<sup>2</sup>

In her letters, Hemphill told her mother and sisters Olivia (called Olive in many letters) and May, and brother Clyde, himself in the army, her perspective of the war. She described life in a British hospital, foreign not only to her, but to most Americans. Her missives illustrate not only her war, but they offer insights to other women's service as well. The letters do not give the entire picture of her experiences, however, as letters to home from American service personnel were censored by higher-ranking officers or supervisors.

Editing of the letters consisted primarily of deleting most salutations, questions about the weather and home folks, comments about numbers of letters received, and similar passages. These edits are indicated by ellipses.<sup>3</sup>

Concordia, Kans.

Dec. 17, 1917

Dear Olive & May [residing in Meriden, Kansas]:

Well I am still here but don't know how soon I will be going. We had word this morning to hold ourselves in readiness for our transportations [sic] at any time. They said we had been selected for Foreign Service with [the] British Expeditionary Force. Where that will land us I do not know.



Florence Edith Hemphill is the third nurse from the right.

2. Joseph H. Ford, ed., *The Medical Department of the United States Army in the World War*, vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1927), 127. For American women's experiences in the war, see also Lettie Gavin, *American Women in World War I* (Niwot: University of Colorado Press, 1997); Dorothy and Carl J. Schneider, *Into the Breach: American Women Overseas in World War I* (New York: Viking Press, 1991).

3. Letters and photographs reproduced here are from the Hemphill Collection.

The nurses up here had gotten up a dinner party for us the other night expecting us in on that six o'clock train and then we didn't come. They sure were disappointed. . . . The girls had us over the next afternoon and gave us each a silver folding drinking cup in a leather case and a box of candy to be opened after we get on the train. The sisters at the hospital gave us a silver napkin clasp with our initials engraved on them.

New York, N.Y.

Jan. 6, 1918

Dear Olive:

We are stationed in a lovely place. It was a club house called the Colonial Clubhouse and furnished in that style but has been turned into a mobilization station for nurses and later to be used as a hospital. It is all donated by one woman. There are about eighty nurses here now from all parts of the U.S. There are forty of us in the gymnasium and I dreamed last night that I was playing basketball. I guess it was the environment. . . .

We didn't need to bring near all we did bring. They furnish us nearly everything—two dozen prs. of stockings, 1/2 doz. Woolen—woolen underwear—suit—cape or coat—shoes 3 prs. heavy tan shoes—raincoats—uniforms of gray shambray, please excuse misspelled words—hat—gloves and I don't know what all, so I may be sending home some things—they say we can't take any of our civilian clothes.

We saw girl street car conductors to day. They had a rather neat uniform of kaki [sic] colored bloomers, leggings and long-tailed coats.


New York, N.Y.

Jan. 15, 1918

Dear Olive:

Have all of my equipment now. We are wearing our uniforms. They are certainly nice. We have blue serge suits and a heavy blue coat and a blue velour hat, a blue silk waist with white collar and cuffs. We wear the U.S. letters on the collar of our coats and also the caduceus. It looks something like this [a drawing of the medical symbol with the letters ANC] Army Nurse Corps.

There are about a hundred and thirty nurses here now. One hundred of them belong to our unit which is called the British Exp. Forces. There are about that many out at Ellis Island too. I sure am glad we didn't have to go out there.

 Army Nurse Corps. There are about a hundred and thirty'"/>

From nurse Hemphill's letter home of January 15, 1918.

Assigned to the British Expeditionary Force, Hemphill and the other nurses in her group embarked on January 18, 1918, at Hoboken, New Jersey.

[No date, probably late January 1918]  
On Board Ship

Yes I am actually on my way. It doesn't hardly seem possible but it is the truth. I can't tell you when we started, where we are nor the name of the ship, but you can see by the seal [on the stationery] that it is an English boat [Cunard Steamship Company] and we have English style too. We just now had afternoon tea. I will come back a regular Britisher. We are on a very nice boat and we have all the luxuries going. Our eats are fine.

"Somewhere" [no date, probably mid-February 1918]  
Dear folks at home:

I hardly know what to write. If I could tell all I know and have seen I could write volumes but we aren't allowed to tell very much so it kind of takes the inspiration to write away.

They say that there is land on both sides of us now but we won't really land until tomorrow. I certainly will be glad to get on solid earth once again.

We certainly have been well guarded against submarines. Besides having boats on all sides of us we have had lifeboat drill every day and the last few days since we have been in the danger zone we have had to carry our life preservers with us every where we go even to our meals. I told Langley if you folks at home could see us all going around with our life belts you would have a fit but we don't think anything about it, even have a good time about it.

Somewhere in France<sup>4</sup>

March 5, 1918

Dear Clyde:

We nurses are all in the same place but divided up in groups among six different hospitals. There are quite a few hospitals all around close together. There is an American hospital just across the street from us.

There is a training ground close here and several of us nurses went and watched some of the cavalry drill the other day. They have all kinds of trenches and barbed wire entanglements around here. I suppose you have learned how to make them by now.<sup>5</sup>

We thought we had a very large convoy in coming over but have learned since that it wasn't anything very big. There were thirteen boats when we started and then when we got to the danger zone we were met by [censored] little submarine destroyers. We certainly were glad the day they came up to us. We had life boat drill every day. We certainly were all ready for a submarine and I feel a little disappointed that we didn't get to see one. Of course I didn't want it to hit us but I would liked to have seen one. . . .

You certainly begin to realize there is a war on when you get over here. Every man you see is in uniform and then you see quite a good many wounded men on the streets. Nearly everyone is in uniform for that matter. Even the girls are doing their bit and have different uniforms. The day I arrived in France I saw all kinds of hydroplanes, aeroplanes and dirigible balloons.

Well it will soon be time for me to go back on duty so I had better quit.

France, March 25, 1918

Dear Olive:

I certainly am glad I came although I am afraid it will ruin me for ever doing private nursing again. It certainly isn't like anything I ever did before. The boys [are] mostly English, Irish and Scotch, we haven't had any Americans here. They are certainly wonderful the way they endure

4. Hemphill, now assigned to #5 General Hospital, BEF, France, wrote this letter on stationery headed "On Active Service with the British Expeditionary Force" and having the YMCA logo.

5. Clyde Hemphill served with Company M, Eleventh Infantry Regiment.



*"The boys" in her care, like the Scots depicted above, greatly impressed the young Kansas nurse. "They are certainly wonderful the way they endure pain without a word and are just as cheerful as can be."*

pain without a word and are just as cheerful as can be. They can't be beaten that's all. They are so grateful for everything you do for them too. Thank you for everything, even a dose of castor oil.

There has been some heavy fighting the last few days. I expect some of our boys are in that as there are some of them at the front.

They say that the Germans or Jerrys as the boys call them have a gun that has a range of seventy five miles [the so-called Paris Gun] and that they are shelling the capitol of F[rance]. It seems an impossibility, doesn't it. Everyone here has their wind up about it. That "has their wind up" is a common expression here. Everyone uses it for being excited. Talk about American slang they aren't in it. The English use as much slang as we do. "Carry On" is another expression used a great deal over here—the same as go ahead or keep right on—keep going. . . .

I wish Dr. Kline would come over here.<sup>6</sup> It would certainly be a fine experience for him. The few operations they did at home seem nothing compared to what they do here. One M.O. [medical officer] did seventy five here himself

yesterday. It's all day long until one & two o'clock at night.

March 30 [1918]

Started this letter nearly a week ago and haven't had a chance to finish it. Have been mighty busy. Have been transferred to another ward—all heavy cases—mostly chest cases with other things besides such as leg amputations, etc. Had several new Sisters [British Nursing Sisters] come today and they could use a good many more.

We haven't heard a word what our boys are doing at the front but of course they are doing their share. . . . Well, it is almost time for me to go to my dinner which is 3:30 a.m.

France, April 11, 1918

My dear Olive:

I am still on night duty. Not so rushed as we were a while back but still pretty busy. I have all chest cases and they are hard. Yes Langley and I were in the same hut with Miss Lory and Miss Arthur from Indianapolis but our happy home is broken up now as Miss Arthur and myself are on night duty and our places are taken by some nurses or V.A.D.'s<sup>7</sup> I don't know which, from South Africa.

That is what you might have come as, a V.A.D. They do all kinds of work from scrubbing to taking care of the patients. They sure work hard but I am afraid you wouldn't like it for you ought to see their hands, poor things, they look like boiled lobsters and mine are getting that way. I don't know what they will look like in the winter. The nurses that have been here in the winter have chilblains on their hands and feet.

If you think bully beef and biscuit is slang you are mistaken, that is everyday language. I have eaten of both and they weren't so bad but I wouldn't like a steady diet of

6. Kline was a doctor with whom Hemphill had some contact during civilian nursing service. She does not further identify him.

7. Voluntary Aid Detachments (VAD) were formed in England in 1909 to organize transportation, set up field kitchens, and provide supplies for improvised hospital trains. "Above all," wrote Lyn MacDonald in *The Roses of No Man's Land* (New York: Atheneum, 1989), 195, the women "were to be trained in the art of improvisation." American nurses exhibited a certain amount of condescension toward the hospital VADs.

it. Here are some of the slang words used here—I don't know how they are spelled but this is the way they sound. Buckshe, meaning an extra one, for example if they all have had a piece of bread and butter and there is a piece [left] over that is a Buckshe piece. Then Tres bon (tra bon) & champions means fine in our language and in the English quite fit. They also say Toot sweet for immediately. That is a French word so it isn't spelled that way but that is the way it sounds. Then another great expression of theirs is "getting the wind up." I got the wind up a minute ago. I thought I heard some one calling Sister in a tone of voice like something dreadful was the matter and I went flying down the length of the ward but everything was quiet. So it must have been in some of the other wards.



*The women of the Volunteer Aid Detachments (VAD), such as the British driver shown above, did "all kinds of work from scrubbing to taking care of the patients."*

When I am not busy I stay in what is called the "Bunk." We would call it in civil life an office but here it is spoken of entirely as the bunk. We have the cutest little stove you ever saw. It looks like a toy stove but it keeps the room warm. The only trouble is you have to keep putting coal in all the time. The coal bucket is larger than the stove itself. . . .

There is a convoy in so I may be pretty busy before the night is over. I hear the ambulances going past now.

France  
May 26, 1918  
My dear Olivia:

There is a constant rumble tonight and the hut shakes ever once in a while. Whether the big offensive has started

or not I do not know. Have been looking for it for some time.

Isn't it terrible the Huns bombing hospitals? I was afraid you folks at home might think it was ours or perhaps they didn't publish it in the papers at home. There is nothing too mean for them to do—the Huns, I mean. They think they can come over here and do anything they want to but just let them get a taste of it and they squeal like pigs which they are.

[continued] May 31

Here several days have passed and I haven't finished this letter yet. Quite a lot has happened too since then.

Came off night duty Monday. Miss Thomas and I went down town and didn't get back until 12:30. went to bed and got up at 2 p.m. and went over to a concert at No. 9 Hosp. It was given entirely by the Amer. boys over there and it certainly was fine. They are a fine lot of boys over there and it does ones heart good to see them and hear them. Then we had tea out on the lawn afterwards.

[continued] June 2nd

I have a new hat. You ought to see it and see me in it. It is perfectly plain with a round crown and a rather narrow brim—sort of a brownish gray with a strap that comes down under my chin—weight five pounds [obviously a British model steel helmet].

Have been on day duty now for several days. Have charge of three huts & two marquees [tents]—all skin cases. About a hundred and fifty patients but have three V.A.D.'s and several orderlies so it isn't so very hard. Am out of doors more and my cold is nearly well.

Langley and I went down town the day before Memorial Day and ordered a wreath to be made of red, white & blue flowers and we had it put on the graves of the American unknown dead that are buried here. All the nurses here at #5 Gen. gave it. The nurses from the Amer. Hosp. decorated the other graves. They held a memorial service out there in the afternoon. I saw the boys from #9 General [Hospital] marching past.

France  
June 11th 1918  
Dear Olive

I went to a circus today—a real American circus—with all the clowns & strong men, etc. It was given by the American unit at #12 General. It was all farce but mighty funny.



During a "real American circus" on June 11, 118, "the nurses gave a Maypole dance that was very pretty."

The nurses gave a Maypole dance that was very pretty. It always makes me homesick when I go where there are a lot of Americans. I wish I were with them. . . .

Well I ought to be going to bed for no telling when I may have to get up and pull on my rubber boots and don my new hat and tear out for the trenches. We sure appreciate a night when we can stay in bed all night. . . .

Don't you worry about my smoking cigarettes. I have gotten a little used to seeing the English girls do it but I can't say it makes me think any better of them.

France  
June 24, 1918

Dear Folks at home:

You can send parcels to me because I am with the B.E.F. It is just to the A.E.F. that they can't be sent without a written order. . . .

One of my Jocks [Scottish soldier] gave me his kilt. It is a Gordon kilt. They wear blue suits while they are patients and their clothes are put in the stores. When they are marked for Con.[valescent] Camp or Blighty [Great Britain] they can go get their things. I wondered how he was going to work it about getting something to leave in but when he went after his things he put one kilt away up under his

arms and put his tunic on over it and then carried the other in his hand.

June 25th

There are two American boys here in the eye ward. I went over to see them today. One of them was from Kansas but away out near the Colorado line. The other was from Louisiana.

We had string beans tonight for supper. You notice I didn't say stringed for they weren't. They would have been mighty good if they only had taken the stems & ends off.

I would be glad to have you send those comforts and if they couldn't be used in the hospital I know some nurses that would be tickled to death to have one. If you folks ever want to send anything for the boys just send money to me and I can buy things over here. They certainly need something extra for they just live on bully beef & biscuit when on the line. That is the reason so many of them have skin diseases.

We are getting new aprons and collars from the Red Cross so I won't need mine from home. I had six aprons made in town and have lost two of them. I don't know where they went to.

France  
July 1st 1918

Dear Olive:

There are some new U.S. officers here. They acted like they were tickled to death to see us. They said they had no idea when they were told they were to be with the British they would find some American girls with them. The men said when they first heard they were to be with the B.E.F. they just went up in the air but now they think they are in clover. The officers in the British army have batmen that polish their boots and bring them tea in the morning before they are out of bed and so on. I don't blame them for liking it, do you. . . .

France  
Friday, July 19, 1918

Dear Olive:

I see by today's paper where the French and Americans have been having good success on the front. I always knew the Americans would do something once they got started. The boys in the ward get the paper every morn-

ing and they are always glad if they can tell me anything about the Americans. I was awake last night in the night and could hear the guns rumbling quite plainly. It seems when the atmosphere is heavy we can hear them plainer.

Have two little discs given me the other day with my name and religion stamped on that I am supposed to wear around my neck. They make a beautiful [illegible word] but I have deposited them in my tin hat and will put them on both together.

France

Aug. 1, 1918

Dear Olive:

My! but I am sleepy. How would you like to go to bed at night and be awakened by the booming of guns and the blowing of whistles and bugles. We sure had a night of it last night, just three different alarms. The first one I got up and put on a few clothes and went back to bed. Things quieted down and I was just thinking of taking off my things when I heard the whirring of the Boche [German] airplanes and I hopped out immediately and pulled on my rubber boots and identification tags and tin hat and headed to the trenches.

We make quite a sight. Dark figures coming from all directions. It reminds me of pictures I have seen of the Klu Klux Klan [sic].

France

Aug. 8, 1918.

Dear May & Family:

We can hear the guns quite distinctly out here this afternoon. Seems we can hear them plainer out in the forest or on a day when the atmosphere is heavy.

Haven't our boys been doing good work though. I am glad they are making good but I didn't expect anything else. They say the French people just idolize our boys. They can have anything they want. That isn't the way they treated the English Tommy though. The boys say man a time they have taken the handle off their pumps so they [the soldiers] couldn't get a drink of water. The people in the shops too don't care whether they wait on them or not. One place where we had our hair mashed [poorly cut] the man told one of our E.[nglish] Sisters that he didn't care for their patronage. But just the same, they are getting rich off the British people.

[continued] Aug. 10th

Didn't get this finished the other day. Will make another attempt. . . .

We are quite busy again. Convoys coming in thick and fast but the boys are sure cheerful for the last thing they saw of Jerry [Germans] he was on the run.

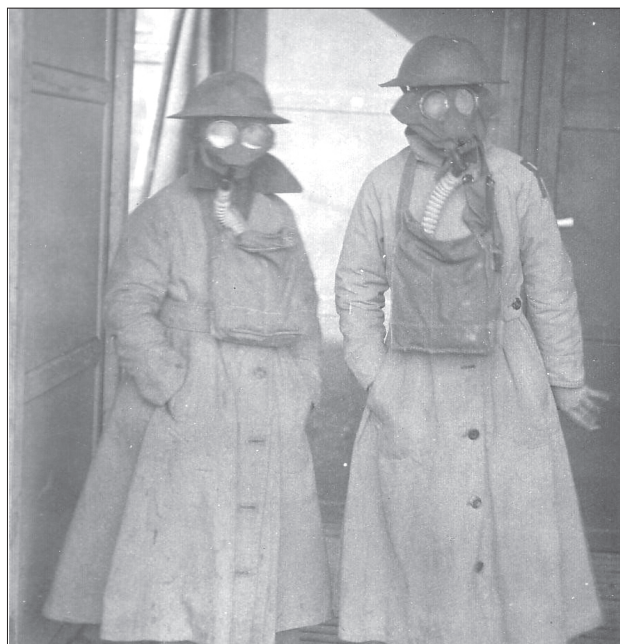
Some of them were telling about the way they surprised the Boche [Germans]. They had been just ready to eat when they had to leave in a hurry. The tea was still hot when the Tommies got there.

France

Aug. 16, 1918

Dear Olive:

You wanted to know where I wore my new fall hat [steel helmet]. Well just about midnight or a little sooner we are awakened from our peaceful slumbers by shrieking whistles. We jump out of bed, pull on a few clothes, don our hats and sally forth to stand in the trenches that zigzag all over the place. They are just wide enough for one person to stand or sit in and come just a little above our heads. It is quite interesting to watch the searchlights in the sky and hear the anti aircraft guns booming and see the shells burst-



*Two U.S. nurses wearing their tin hats and gas masks, a ubiquitous part of World War I equipage.*



ing and hear the hum-hum of the Boche plane as he tries to get through the barrage. We used to do that but for the last few nights we have been going to our wards.

Now don't get the wind up as the men say for there is nothing to be afraid of. I only wish he [the enemy] wouldn't disturb our nights sleep. This doesn't happen every night though. Just enough to let us know they are still on the job. Perhaps I ought not to write this. I wouldn't if I thought that Mother was going to read it but it is quiet back here compared to what it is up nearer the front.

What do you know about them turning loose that gas over there. Haven't they got their nerve. The people there will have to wear gas masks.

October 6, 1918

Dear May:

I certainly am ashamed of myself for not writing. I think everyday I will write and something happens that I don't get to it. Our room seems to be the meeting place for all of the Yanks. When I do have a minute's time there is always someone here. So this evening there are three of us sitting around the fire writing. . . .

It has been pretty cold for the last week or two. I don't see what I will do when it gets really cold. I just expect to freeze to death. Maybe the war will be over though. The men all say it will be over by Christmas. I hope they are right. Poor things, they just can't bear the thoughts of be-



Above, soldiers recuperate inside a Nissen hut (prefabricated shelter), which served as a British Army hospital.

ing out here another winter. The most of them would just do anything to get out of it. They are fed up, they say, and I don't see how they have stood it as long as they have.

I got the coffee and it sure was fine. Its all gone. I gave the last of it to one of the English Sisters to make coffee for one of her American boys that has had his foot off. We had several parties with it. Miss Evans, an Irish girl that is in the room next to us, was in one night and I made some coffee and the next night she came in and said "You aren't going to have coffee tonight are you." She said it was the best coffee she had had since she left home.

I made some candy—divinity—in the ward one evening and maybe you think the boys didn't enjoy it. We got three pounds of sugar a piece from the American commissary and one of the girls got a can of Caro [Karo] syrup from the American canteen and she let me have a cup of it and I made part of my sugar up into candy. I am going to use the rest to make some for Clyde.

We haven't had an air raid for so long. We have almost forgotten there is such a thing. I expect they are keeping Jerry so busy up the line he doesn't have time for us. I hope he never comes back for it rather keeps one on a strain thinking they will have to get up in the middle of the night and dress.

We have had quite a good many Americans in this last week. They are mostly from N.Y. and N. Carolina. I am glad we are getting some of them for that was the one thing I hated about being with the B.E.F. that we weren't getting to take care of our own boys. They are mighty glad to see us too.

If you want to send some money for the boys you can just send a bill and I can get it exchanged over here. I am going to spend part of my money on gramophone records. Miss Dunlop, My V.A.D., bought a gramophone for the men to use and they sure do enjoy it. Am sending the children some handkerchiefs.

October 24, '18

Dear Olive:

You ought to see my new overseas cap. It is just like the boys' caps only blue. They will be fine for this winter.

An American nurse died here the other day.<sup>8</sup> She had just come over. Two of their number died in England and

8. The American nurse may have been Nina Louise Seymour, Elma Graves, or Margaret Hamilton. They all died during this period. See untitled typewritten report of U.S. women serving overseas, Women's Overseas Service League Records, National World War I Museum.

she out here. We went to the cemetery for the burial and there were two U.S. boys buried too at the same time, all in one grave. The ceremony was quite simple but very impressive. They had the firing of the guns and the last post.

We are having a lot of that influenza over here. It is dreadful. They are bad right from the start.

France

November 18, 1918

Dear Folks at Home:

My, a week ago today was an exciting day [Armistice, November 11, 1918]. The people here just went wild. Langley and I had a half day and went downtown—such a crowd. It was worse than a Fourth of July celebration at home. It lasted for about three days & nights. I was glad to be home by dark for it was getting wilder every minute and you can imagine the number of drunk people when wines, etc. flow like water and is drunk more than water.

Didn't things come to an end suddenly though. I didn't expect it to end yet for awhile. I don't know when we will be coming home but I don't suppose it will be long. I suppose we will be the first as we are with the British and they won't be needing us much longer.

France

November 24 '18

Dear Olive:

There isn't much to write about only my work and [you] now have enough of that without hearing about mine. We don't even have the officers to go out with, even a "loot" (second) [lieutenant]. There are a few American officers here but they are all married and the English ones are the limit. They are married too but that doesn't make much difference. They are not my style. We aren't allowed to go any place with them either. It is against the rules of the British army for the nurses to go to dinner downtown with an officer and a dance they hold up their hands in horror.

The day the Armistice was signed the officers from the Royal Engineers base came over and asked Matron if they gave a dance could we come and she was shocked to think they would ask such a thing. They did give a concert the other night and served tea and cakes and invited us over. It was very nice. But tea is the most exciting thing they can do here.

The Americans were going to have a Thanksgiving dinner downtown and have turkey and things but we were told we couldn't as it was against the rules of the British army.

Dec. 17, 1918

Dear Olive:

We left Nice on the 12th and stayed in Paris until the 16th and were there to receive President Wilson. Had a fine place to see the whole show. Paid a French girl five francs to stand in her cart. Before he came along just out in front of us we saw two or three French men decorated. The people in Paris simply went wild that day. The streets were one solid mass of people singing, dancing, throwing confetti. It sure enough was gay Paris. I don't think the streets were clear all night long. We went to a picture show in the evening and it was late when we went home and they were still crowded.

We didn't do any sightseeing that day. Went to a matinee in the afternoon at the Follies Bergere. It was the funniest thing I have seen. I laughed more than I have done altogether since I came over. The next day we went to the Notre Dame Cathedral to an early mass and heard the organ play. It is the finest organ in Europe. My! but its a beautiful cathedral and so immense. The two most beautiful windows have been removed on account of air raids but there was still one large rose window. We also saw that morning the St. Gervais cathedral where so many people were killed by a shell from Big Bertha [actually the Paris Gun] on Good Friday. The bloodstains were still on the floor. . . .

In the heart of Paris there is a big square called the Place de la Concorde, another place where a good bit of history has taken place, and on both sides of the street all around the square and all the way out to the Arc de Triomphe, are big guns captured from the Germans, also tanks. We stood near a big German tank when we were waiting for Wilson to pass. We also saw German aeroplanes and balloons. I wouldn't take anything for the privilege of being over here and seeing all I have seen. I have wished a hundred times though that you were with me and seeing it too.

I bought twelve pounds of chocolate from the American commissary today for my patients for Christmas. I don't have any idea when I will be coming home. Think there will be a change the first of the year but whether I am sent home or not I don't know. Would rather like to go on into Germany [with the occupation forces].

April 1, 1919

Dear May:

I'm now in a German prisoner ward and they are just being fitted up with clothes to go home. I wish you could hear them. I suppose they are as glad to get home as our

boys are. The most of these [men] will never fight again as most of them are with just one arm or something else just as bad. Several are blind—no eyes at all—caused by hand grenade.

April 11

Here it is the 11th and I haven't finished this letter yet. I don't seem to have any ambition anymore. I can't seem to accomplish anything.

There were a hundred and fifty nurses through here the other day on their way home. Some of them were some of the girls that came over in our unit. I wish I were one of them but guess it will just be a matter of time until we all will be on our way. . . .

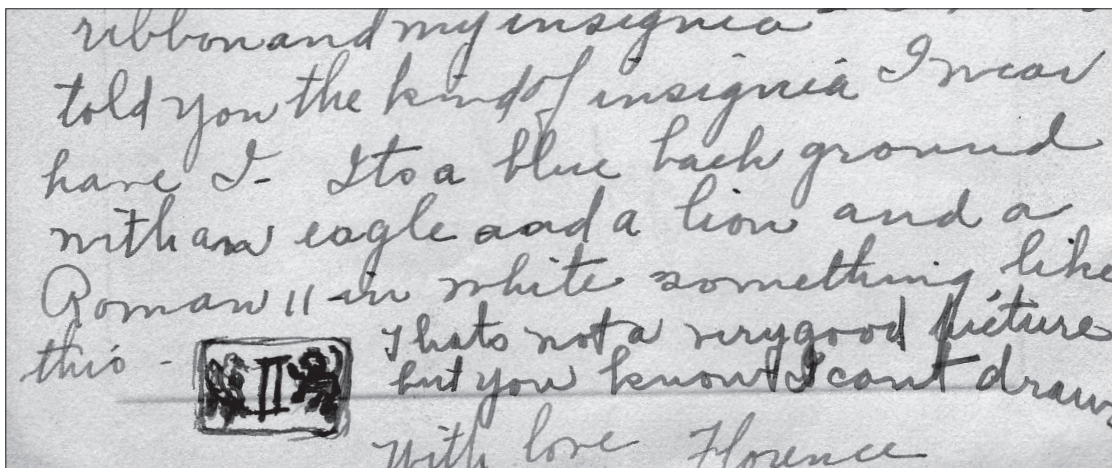
Our Germans expect to leave either tomorrow or Wednesday. I hope they do go for I would much rather take care of our own boys. They are very nice patients though and they would do anything for us. When you see these boys in the hospital you can hardly believe they have done the horrible things they say they have done. If I had to choose between the Germans & French, I would choose the Germans every time.

I don't have any love for the French but you don't need to tell anyone I think you won't find many that have been over here that do have any use for the French. They are dirty, immoral and everything else. The country is not worth fighting for. Well, maybe I had better stop.

Joue les Tours  
May 26, 1919  
Dear Olive:

You have me beat for writing. I have had two letters from you since I last wrote. They aren't long in coming over now. The last one was just two weeks. . . .

Two of our girls that were in our unit were decorated yesterday with the Royal Red Cross by the British. We had



From nurse Hemphill's letter home of May 26, 1919.

quite some ceremony. I only wish yours truly could be bringing one home. They weren't given for any special service but for good work.

They had started yesterday letting about twelve nurses off for the day to take trips in ambulances to see some of the chateaus around here, but a big motor truck full of boys ran into a stone wall, crippling a lot of them and killing a girl that was with them. This has put a stop to our getting to go. I sure am sorry for I wanted to see some of them. . . .

If I am here until the middle of July, I can put on a third service stripe. I will be all decked up when I come home with service stripes, the A.E.F. ribbon and my insignia. I never told you the kind of insignia I wear, have I? It's a blue background with an eagle and a lion and a Roman [numeral] II in the white, something like this [U.S. Second Corps shoulder sleeve insignia]. That's not a very good picture but you know I can't draw.

June 6, 1919

Dear Olive:

We stood inspection yesterday too by General Pershing. We went down to Barracks 66 for it and as he passed in front of us he said "I wish the men could turn out as well dressed as the nurses do." Afterwards he gave us a talk and then shook hands with all the nurses. Think of it. I shook hands with the Commanding Officer of the A.E.F. We had our pictures taken too I was right up front.

We are going to have an extra good dinner tonight in honor of the Red Cross girls that are leaving next week—fried chicken and strawberry short cake.

July 2, 1919

Dear Olive:

Have been waiting here at the embarkation center now for about two weeks. We thought when we left Tours that we would be home for the 4th of July but no such luck. There are 1300 nurses waiting here and about that many at Brest [France].

We are quartered in what used to be Base Hospital 69. There are forty eight of us in a ward. Such a lot of women. I am so tired of crowds of women I don't know what to do. We stand in line for chow. Stand in line for clean linen. I suppose we will stand in line today for our pay. I am willing to stand in line for that though for I am so nearly broke I am bent.

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*A small reminder of her service in France came in a postcard, postmarked December 18, 1921, addressed to Florence Hemphill at 1101 N. Kansas Avenue, Chanute, Kansas.*

Dear Miss,

Do you remember of the German prisoner in Ward 27 in Tours? I'm that [man] and send you best greetings for Christmas and New Year.

Yours, Julius Seibt, Berlin.

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*Following her duty "over there," Florence Edith Hemphill returned to private nurse practice for a time. She eventually settled in Kansas City, Kansas, where she shared a house with five of her siblings and their widowed mother. Retired in 1963, Florence moved to Overland Park, Kansas. She died on April 16, 1979, and is buried in Elmwood Cemetery, Chanute. KH*