



November 1, 2025

By Pierre LaGrandeur

The 333rd Machine Gun Battery

My Grandfather Alfred LaGrandeur enlisted in the army on March 29th, 1918, at the age of 26. He became a member of the 333rd Machine Gun Battalion, was promoted to Sergeant on May 7th and Corporal on August 17th. He was very eager to join the fight. They trained for trench warfare and drilled with rifles, handguns and bayonets. His battalion was moved from Wisconsin, Detroit, Canada, Niagara Falls (they were given a half hour to look at the falls) to a base near New York City. They spent a couple of weeks there enjoying leave in the city and displaying their skills to the local gentry. (This article is based primarily on entries from a diary that Alfred kept during World War I.)



Alfred John LaGrandeur



333rd Machine Gun Battery

They were finally shipped to Europe on September 14, 1918, on the *Olympic*, the sister ship of the *Titanic*. They were quartered below the water line in “hot, ill-smelling quarters, packed like sardines. The food is bad, treated like animals.” Alfred bribed a guard to get a state room where one “could live like a human being, but I spent most of my time on deck.” There was a submarine alert at 7:30 p.m. on the 16th and a German spy was arrested who had been signaling with a flashlight. They escaped safely. On the 18th he said, “Some trip, the quarters given are not fit for cattle, and the food is hardly touched by the boys.”

September 20th, "Sighted land this morning and arrived in port at 11:30 a.m. An epidemic of Spanish Flu broke out on board and 6 died. Over 400 were taken to the hospital at South Hampton G.B. "I stayed on board and spent the night tending to the sick."

9/21 "Disembarked and saw shiploads of prisoners and wounded coming back from the front. A lot of men were so weak they could not carry their packs, some died simply because of a lack of attention from the officers. This is some rest camp; we sleep on the wooden floors of the tents and the streets are all mud. This town is filled with wounded." At the YMCA there he met a French woman. "It was good to talk French to someone. The camp is in quarantine on account of meningitis."

On September 30th they left South Hampton for La Havre, France. "Disembarked at 8:00 a.m. and marched 4 kilometers to camp without breakfast. Some hunger! This is a beautiful town."

10/2 "Left camp today for some point in France. We marched to the depot and there we entered boxcars 7x14 marked Hommes 40 - Chevaux 8. Rotten conditions but the boys are in good spirits."

10/4 "Arrived at Carbon – Blanc 12 kilometers from Bordeaux. All one sees around here are grape vines. We are billeted at the winery La Tour Gueyrand, the officers stay at the chateau. My French is certainly handy."

10/10 "Went to Bordeaux with the C.O. and Capt. Today as an interpreter."

10/14 "Driving motorcycle & interpreter for C.O. Put on detached service at HQ."

11/7 "86th Div. leaves tonight for classification camp, then on to the front. OH BOY!"

11/10 "The Kaiser and the crown prince abdicated. 110,000 soldiers came to this camp today bound for the front. Comfortably settled for a good night's sleep when orders came to move. Had to break camp in 15 minutes in the dark. Marched 9 miles to classification camp, rolled in at 1 a.m."

11/11/1918 "Went through the mill this P.M. Ordered to 2nd division at the front. Expect to leave at any minute. Rotten place 30,000 troops in an ankle-deep muddy pen. Armistice signed today."

11/13 "There was some error and we missed going to the 2nd division."

From here they are moved to several areas, and it is "Colder than hell! Nothing to eat."

11/27 "Thanksgiving and no turkey. We had some stew, bread and half a cup of coffee. May God forgive the officers to blame for starving us, because I cannot. We had to eat our meals out of doors in pouring rain thinning out the stew. I'll bet our dog back home had a better meal today, at least he had plenty to eat."

12/11 "Picked for a company today, don't know where we're going or why."

12/12 "Moved to Mayet today and billeted there. Turned in our gas masks. Rumor is bound for Paris on MP duty."

12/16 "Disembarked at Juvisy-sur-Orge at 3:00 p.m. today, very nice town. Marched to camp 4 kilometers from town. We can see the Eiffel Tower in Paris from here, only 13 kilometers from camp. Good quarters."

12/19 "Left camp at 2 p.m. on trucks for Paris. The king and queen of Italy arrived today. Billeted at Bois de Boulogne, 20 minutes from the heart of town. Good quarters in an old hospital. Real beds with mattresses. Great inside, showers, baths, OH JOY it is a great life!"



Postcard: Boulogne-sur-Seine – La Rue de L'Église

12/25/18 "On guard until 4 p.m. Christmas day. Marched to Auteuil and took the subway to Paris. Went to the YMCA at Palais de Glace, had dinner and a Christmas box. The Champs Elysees is just lined with captured German arms. Saw a German tank 34 and an Egyptian obelisk. Given a permanent pass."

1/1/1919 "New Year's Day, BROKE!"

From here he travels to Versailles and several places in Belgium. The next entry is on July 10th, 1919, when he leaves Paris and on July 11th, he boards the USS *Martha Washington* for the USA. "Rotten Boat and Trip."

7/27 "Arrive Hoboken 11:00 a.m. and go to Camp Merritt N.J."

8/1 "Leave camp Merritt N.J."

8/3 "Arrive camp Grant."

8/5/1919 "FREE MAN!"



Flowers Pressed Between Pages of Alfred's Diary

There were a number of different kinds of passes issued to soldiers that allowed them to take a leave of duty for various reasons. Here is an example of one that Alfred received.



Authorized Temporary Absence from Duty Pass

The letter below was mailed by Alfred's sister in 1918. It traveled across Europe and found him a year later in Somerset, Wisconsin.



Letter Addressed to Cpl. Alfred J. LaGrandeur

The Germans were able to fire upon the city of Paris from afar using what was termed a "Paris Gun," which was a type of long-range artillery used exclusively by their army. During church services on Good Friday, March 29, 1918, one of their shells struck the centuries-old Church of Saint-Gervais-Saint-Protais and the explosion caused the roof to entirely collapse resulting in civilian casualties; inside the church about 91 people were killed and another 68 were injured during this attack. Alfred visited this site a year later in 1919 and wrote the following letter to his parents.


Knights of Columbus
OVERSEAS SERVICE

letter written in 1919
by Alfred John LaGrandeur (1891-1965)

ON ACTIVE SERVICE WITH
AMERICAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCES

A. P. O. _____

DATE _____



Did I tell you that I visited
the church of St Gervais that
was bombed on Good Friday
last year. The Germans asked
the Allies not to bomb any
towns on Good Friday so that
the people could worship
safely. The Allies kept their
word. but those damn
Bosh bombed all the worse
There were 150 women and
children killed by the explosion.
The blood stains are still on
the floor. I have a piece of
the shell that struck that
church. It was given to me
by a French detective.

Well
my dear parents there is
not much to write about

This photograph shows part of the heavily damaged Church of Saint-Gervais-Saint-Protais that was incurred during the shelling on Good Friday, March 29, 1918. Following World War I, the church was eventually restored and it has remained in use to this day.



**Church of Saint-Gervais-Saint-Protais, Paris, France – Circa 1919
Alfred John LaGrandeur Pictured on Right**



**Alfred "Fred" LaGrandeur and
Niece Sybil (Age Two) at the
Family Home in 1919**

Leaving the days he served in the war behind him, Alfred returned to Somerset, Wisconsin, where he was welcomed home by his parents Henry Alfred LaGrandeur and Donattie Derouin LaGrandeur, as well as by his siblings Donald, Alice, Rose, and Henry II.

On September 4, 1920, he married Alice Margaret McKeon and together they raised a family that included six children.

Early in 1920 he had taken over the LaGrandeur Red & White Store, which was the family grocery store started by his father and grandfather in 1884; Alfred ran this store until his death.

Alfred died on April 28, 1965, at the age of 73. He is interred at Saint Anne Catholic Church Cemetery, in Somerset, Wisconsin.

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