

WWI - ~~6673~~ 1730

3.  
1

US Army Military History Institute  
Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, 17013

WORLD WAR I RESEARCH PROJECT  
ARMY SERVICE EXPERIENCES QUESTIONNAIRE

Part 1-- General Military Service

1. Name Donald Drake Kyler. Rank or grade Pvt., Pfc., Cpl., Sgt.

Present address 1216 Leonard Avenue.

City Elkhart State Indiana Zip code 46516

Unit Company G, 16th Infantry. Commanded by Captain Wildish & others of the 16th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division.

Commanded by Major Generals Sibert, Bullard, Summerall, etc.

2. Enlistment: (date) April 27th, 1917. (age) 16 years.

(place) Fort Thomas Kentucky. for (term) Duration of the war.

Previous occupation School boy, and farm work.

Had you ever served in the Regulars, Volunteers, or National Guard?

If so, when and where? No. But I had taken military training.

Why did you enlist?

Enthusiasm for soldiering and a patriotic fervor, as influenced and encouraged by my grandfather (a former soldier) and other members of my family.

What do you recall about entering military service (your initial reactions and experiences)?

Not as severe treatment as I had expected, though we were given intense drill and training from the first day. And it was impressed on us that we were in the Regular Army and that any violation of rules and regulations would be severely dealt with. Some of the recruits did not adapt to authority readily and could not stand the strain, and were transferred out. I had some previous military training and was pre-disciplined by thought and attitude.

3. Where did you train as a recruit?

Fort Bliss, Texas.

What were you trained in?

Infantry drill, both close order and extended order. Minor tactics (platoon and company), the use of rifle company weapons, marksmanship, bayonet and hand to hand combat, the use of ground cover and

1

3  
2  
the management of our own persons in the field. Our evenings were used in instruction in military law, customs of the service and other subjects. That schedule was maintained seven days per week. We were allowed no leisure time.

Were you trained in first aid, signaling, radio, or the use of any special equipment?

We had a few hours of first aid demonstrations. Half of us were told to learn the Morse Code for use in signaling, the other half the semaphore system. When we got to France we were issued a few battery powered signal lights. They were discarded after a short time as being impractical. Later, we were taught the use of multi-colored signal rockets.

What were your experiences, if any, at officer's training camps?

Did your training prepare you adequately for your service overseas?

No. But considering the short time that we recruits had been trained, it was remarkably good. At that time about half of our personnel, (including the officers) were Regular Army men. They were well trained. But when we got to France the addition of new weapons, (grenades, machine rifles, and mortars) presented new problems. Intense training continued for three months. We had French and British advisors during that time.

4. At what posts were you stationed during your service?

Fort Thomas, Kentucky; Fort Bliss, Texas. After returning to this country: Camp Merit, N.J., Camp Meade, Md., Camp Taylor, Ky., Camp Dix, N.J., Columbus Barracks, Oh., Fort Jay, N.Y., West Point, N.Y.

Did you have any unusual assignments?

- (a) As an assistant to naval gunners who, manned the deck guns on the troop transport going overseas. There was target practice and one submarine alarm.
- (b) I was sometimes used by my company commander as a scout and personal emissary.
- (c) After the war there were several occasions when I was sent to arrest and return to custody certain individuals who had been located by the army's Department of Criminal Investigation.
- (d) During the target season in 1922 I was in command of forty men who were semi-permanently located at an isolated target range.

5. What was your opinion of the weapons you saw or used in the service?

Our rifles and pistols were good, and better than those of our allies. The machine rifles supplied to us were of French manufacture and were issued one to each of our squads. They were too heavy, inaccurate, of limited tactical use, and caused a waste of effort and ammunition. After the end of the war we were supplied with machine rifles of American manufacture which were better mechanically, but also of limited tactical use, namely, on close range concentrated targets. Grenades of several types were useful and effective when available. Mortars were used by special units and also very effective.

I had an opportunity to practice with many captured German

2.

3.

REMIANT

infantry weapons. In general, they were as good and sometimes better than ours. But they were too heavy and lacked mobility. Their rifles were very similiar to ours, but their machine rifles, machine guns, and mortars were not.

6. What were your opinions of the equipment, clothing, and rations you were issued?

- (a) Our infantry pack and accessories were better than those of the other armies that I observed.
- (b) The rolling kitchens and combat wagons, 14 of which were supplied to each infantry regiment, were both patterned after the artillery gun and caison idea. They were clumsy and very difficult to maneuver or control when in motion. The necessity of traveling on narrow trails and roads, around sharp turns etc., made them especially unsuited for the conditions encountered. Our French allies did not have similar vehicles, but instead had lighter more maneuverable wagons.
- (c) The wrap puttees supplied to us in France were a hinderance. Most of us preferred the canvas leggins formerly worn. The woolen gloves given to us, soon had holes in them and were a failure. The work type gloves that I had worn while on the farm back home would have been much more durable. Our raincoats were also a failure. They did not shed water very well. The waterproof ponchos formerly supplied would have been much more comforting to us. Otherwise our clothing was adequate.
- (d) The foodstuffs supplied overseas were somewhat different than that we had in the United States. The shortage of shipping prevented the supply of fresh fruit or vegetables. We were limited to dried and pressed fruit, bulk dry foods such as beans, rice, etc. A field bakery was established in France from which all of our bread came. Meat came to us wrepped in burlap. It supposedly had been kept cold by refrigeration, but by the time it was distributed to our cooks, spoilage often had begun. However, after cooking it was palatable.

A purchasing commission bought foodstuffs from local sources and from surrounding countries, such as Spain, Portugal, North Africa, etc.

Although we were frequently very hungry, we fared well enough to be kept healthy. For a short time my unit while attached to French units, were fed by them. We did not like that very well.

7. What did you think of the quality of leadership while you were in service?

(a) Some leaders were capable and performed well: some did not. When I entered the service it seemed that most of the leaders (both commissioned and noncommissioned) performed well. But the rapid expansion of the army caused many of them to be promoted to positions that they were unprepared for. Some were failures. Others overcame their inexperience and became good leaders. Many enlisted men were given commissions and served very well in company and even in field grades. In my experience in combat they were superior to those coming from officer's training camps.

(b) When my company entered a combat zone in September 1917, we had a company commander, who although a graduate of a leading university, was totally inept. He stayed in a dug-out in the rear and never once visited his command while it was in the line. Fortunately, he was relieved of command and out of the regiment. He was replaced by a

4.  
first lieutenant who had good intentions but not the commandability that was required.

Several months later we got a company commander who had been in the National Guard for many years. He was the best company commander that I ever served under. He was a good administrator, an able tactician, and a fair disciplinarian. But more importantly, he had the respect and admiration of the men of his company. He commanded the company about two years.

During the Aisne-Marne offensive there were many casualties among our leaders. First Sergeant Baughn and Sergeant Graves exercised extraordinary ability and leadership during that engagement. Both were killed in a later battle.

8. What did you think of discipline at the time (lax, fair, moderate, strict, harsh)?

At the time I thought it was moderate, but as time went on, increasingly, I thought it was lax.

Do you recall any particular punishments for breaches of discipline?

- (a) I was made to dig a deep hole and bury garbage that I had discarded.  
(b) I was severely reprimanded and made to apologize for an insolent field message that I had sent to an associate.

What did you think about military courts and justice?

In my opinion, the sentences handed down by military courts were less severe than they should have been.

9. Did you know of any reasons for desertion?

Perhaps fear in combat; or the fear of punishment for deeds already done. Or repugnance for everything military.

Was there much theft in your unit?

There was some. Some thieves were caught and punished: some were not. It is interesting to note that the punishment imposed on a thief by official authority (military court or otherwise), often was less severe than that imposed by his comrades. The life of a petty thief in a unit might be, and often was, made so miserable that he would want to transfer out.

10. What forms of off-duty recreation were common?

Gambling, various types of ball games, athletic competition, going to entertainments in nearby villages or camp theaters, and visiting friends.

11. How did you and your comrades get along with civilians in the U.S.?

Before going overseas I had little contact with them. After returning to the U.S., our relations were usually friendly, but not always.

12. What did you think of the medical and supply services in the service?

The medical service was poor by today's standards, but as good as was

5  
possible in the circumstances then prevailing. It was much better than in previous times.

How was the health of your unit?

In general, good. Most of the men were healthy when entering the service. But there was some disease, particularly when exposed to climatic and war time conditions. Some of the men were evacuated and never returned to duty.

13. What did soldiers use their pay for?

Some sent allotments home. However, many others squandered theirs on liquor or lewd women.

14. Was liquor a problem? If so, how was liquor obtained?

Yes. It caused much drunkenness. Usually by purchase.

15. Was there much gambling? If so, what types?

Yes. Poker, rummy, dice, etc.

16. Do you recall any songs that were popular during your military service?

We had some tunes peculiar to the army, some of which were obscene. I do not remember any of the songs that were popular then.

17. Do you recall any military slang words or phrases peculiar to those times?

(a) Dog robber. --Meaning an officer's orderly.

(b) Going over the hill. --Meaning desertion.

(c) Ninety day wonder. --Meaning a newly appointed officer.

(d) Slum. --Meaning the stew that we were often fed.

(e) G.I. --Meaning general issue material. In later years it came to mean soldiers, in general.

(f) A stiff. --Meaning a corpse, or dead body.

(g) P.C. --Meaning a command post. --From French, "Poste de Commandant".

## PART II -- OVERSEAS SERVICE

18. When you served outside the U.S., from what port did you leave the U.S.?

Hoboken, New Jersey.

19. What do you recall of your travel experiences (i. e., R. R., wagon, truck, or ships)?

While in this country we traveled in regular railway passenger cars. We traveled from St. Nazaire, France to Gondrecourt, France, in French railway passenger coaches. Thereafter, when traveling by rail in Europe we were always in freight cars. We made several trips that way. We made several moves from front to front packed tightly in French army trucks. That was a trying ordeal. The ship that took us to Europe was a hastily converted freight ship. We were very crowded and had unsatisfactory sanitary facilities. When returning from Europe after

6 ?  
the war, the conditions were much better. Less crowding, better accommodations, etc.

20. If you served abroad, what sort of country and people did you expect to find?

The same as I did find. A nice country and war weary people.

21. What were your first impressions of service abroad?

I was impressed by the almost total effort of the people in the war effort. As most of the able bodied men were in the armed services or other essential duties, the necessary work roundabout was done by women, children, or old men. For instance, the train crews who transported us across France were women.

Did your views change later?

Only slightly. In every society there are always those who try to take an unfair advantage of any situation to enhance themselves, financially or otherwise.

22. How did you and your comrades get along with civilians in Europe, the Middle East, or Asia before, during, and after hostilities?

Very well in general. However, there were instances when trouble developed, chiefly by our own transgressions.

23. Was there much consorting with local women?

Considerable, by some of our members, when an opportunity came.

24. Did you know of or observe any looting by soldiers?

Close to an active fighting front there were always villages and buildings which had been abandoned by the people. If there was anything of value therein, particularly if it was easily carried or eatable, it was usually taken by certain of our members. We found fruit on trees in orchards, dug potatoes in gardens, and caught a few chickens. And wine was not overlooked either.

After capturing an enemy position we took advantage of anything the enemy may have left. And regrettably, the dead were often searched for valuables by some of our members. I have seen fingers cut off to obtain rings.

25. How was the morale of your unit (mail from home, living conditions, general homesickness, etc.)?

The military morale of my unit was good until the end of the war, after which it declined.

26. Did you ever have anything to do with gathering of intelligence information (scouting, etc.) in France, Italy, the Middle East, or Russia?

Only to the extent of, and limited to my company and battalion situation.

7

27. Did you know or observe any newspaper war correspondents?

I never saw any, but heard of them.

28. What did you think of newspaper and magazine coverage at the time?

I never had an opportunity to read any.

29. If you have read any histories, articles, or other recent writings on campaigns in France, Italy, the Middle East, Northern Russia, or Siberia, what is your opinion of their value and authenticity?

I have read various accounts and experiences written by leaders of the campaigns in France and also by reporters and other observers. Although historically valuable and essentially true, their implications do not always coincide.

### PART III--COMBAT SERVICE

30. Did you take part in any combat action?

Yes.

If so, where, when, and against whom (Austrian, German, Turkish, or Russian personnel)?

- (a) On the French eastern front north east of Nancy in October and November 1917. To help hold the line, engage in combat patrols, and one raid against German troops.
- (b) On a front facing north between St. Mihiel and Pont a Mousson, from December, 1917 to March, 1918. To help hold the line, engage in patrols and help repel a German raid.
- (c) On the northern front somewhere south of Amiens. April to June, 1918, help hold the line.
- (d) At the same place. Late June to July, 1918. Take part in an offensive known as the Montdidier-Noyon Offensive.
- (e) On a front near Soissons. July, 18th to about July, 25th, 1918. Take part in an offensive known as Aisne-Marne Offensive.
- (f) On the eastern front somewhere north-east of Toul. In a defensive sector from August, 5th to August, 24th, 1918.
- (g) Take part in the offensive against the St. Mihiel Salient, September, 11th to September, 14th, 1918.
- (h) Somewhere south of Verdun, take part in the first phase of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. Late in September to October, 12th, 1918.
- (i) West of there. Continuing the offensive during the second phase from October, 1st to October, 12th, 1918.
- (j) Near Sedan. Take part in the third and final phase of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive from November, 6th to November, 16th, 1918.

What do you recall you were thinking and experiencing at the time?

During the first few days in combat situations I was very much afraid. Then gradually a sort of stoical numbness came. The realization of danger was present, but I could continue to function without the sensitivity of the terror or horror of combat.

31. Did you ever participate in cooperative operations with the sister services?

Only to the extent of carrying shells to the navy gunners on the troop transport.

32. Was your unit (company, battalion, regiment, division) ever attached to an Allied command? Yes.  
If so, when, where, and which one?

- (a) From mid October to mid November, 1917 we were in the Sommerviller Sector northeast of Nancy and were attached to the 18th French Division.
- (b) From January to mid March, 1918 we were in the Ansauville Sector northwest of Toul and were attached to the 69th French Division.
- (c) From mid April to late June, 1918 we were in the Cantigny Sector south of Amiens, holding the line. And including the attack that followed, to July 4th 1918, we were attached to the 6th Corps of the French 1st Army.
- (d) From early July to July, 23rd, 1918 in the Aisne-Marne offensive, we were attached to the 20th Corps of the 10th French Army.
- (e) From July 30th to August 20th, while in the Saizerais Sector northeast of Toul, we were attached to the French Army eastern command.

Thereafter we were always under American command.

Were special procedures adopted to facilitate operations (i.e. attachment of interpreters, liaison officers, NCO's, special training or familiarization courses, etc.)?

We had a French interpreter attached to our regimental headquarters. From time to time liaison officers were about, not only from French units, but also from neighboring units of our own army. Soon after arriving in France my regiment had been put in close training with units of the 11th Alpine Chasseurs, of the French Army. Also we had special instructors in the use of grenades and others who were experts in hand to hand fighting and jujitsu.

What were your opinions on the troops of our other allies? (Canadian, Australian, New Zealand, Great Britain, France, colonial troops)?

The Scottish troops who relieved us near Soissons showed much elan, and I thought a disregard for danger, since they reconnoitered our position during daylight hours and in view of the enemy. They relieved us that night and attacked at dawn. They were good fighters. Most of the units of the French Army that I came in contact with, were well trained, disciplined, and aggressive. They also had many divisions that were war-weary and not dependable. Their black colonial troops were formidable in an attack. They would attack, take an enemy position at great cost to themselves, but were not good at holding a line. I had very little contact with other allied troops.



Did their arms and equipment differ from that of our soldiers? Yes.

Our back pack and accessories were superior to any of theirs that I saw. Also, our rifles, pistols, and bayonets were better than theirs. Our transportation vehicles, (rolling kitchens, water carts, combat wagons, baggage wagons, etc.) were too clumsy and less efficient than were theirs.

Did this cause any problem or difficulty in combat? Yes.

33. Did you know of any problems between American and Allied units relating to communications, staff procedures, maintenance and supply, intelligence, etc.?

Sometimes our supply and movement routes became congested to the extent that it required military police (ours or theirs) to establish order. The other questions I do not know about.

34. Did you and your comrades consider your enemy (Germans, Austrians, Turks, Bolsheviks) to be good fighters?

The Germans, in general, were good fighters. The Austrians somewhat less so. The only ones of the latter that I saw, were mixed in with German troops. The others I never saw.

Did you consider them well trained and led?

Some of their units were well trained and led, but some other units and individuals evidently had very little training.

Were they well armed?

They were well armed, considering armaments. But the lack of mobility; the inability of rapid movement was a hinderence to them. Rapid movement was crucial in a war of movement, versus a static one, as those campaigns were rapidly becoming.

What did you think about these enemies, as people?

The same as I would think about myself. My ancestors were Germans.

35. How were American prisoners treated by the enemy?

I do not know.

36. How were enemy prisoners treated by U.S. forces?

Some were treated well, some were treated harshly, and there were a few atrocities committed by U.S. troops.

PART IV -- OCCUPATION and DEMOBILIZATION

37. Did you assist in the establishment of civil government during occupation duty? No.

RECORDS

38. How were local civilians treated by the allied military administrations?  
So far as I knew, fairly but firmly.

How were local civilians treated by the soldiers?

Usually in a very friendly way-- after we got to know them.

39. If you were in the Regular Army or Marines, why did you choose to leave (or stay in) the service? National Guard? Organized Reserves?

I left the Regular Army in 1924 because of disenchantment with the conditions then prevailing. Our reconstituted units were not being properly trained. The pay was low and discipline was not being maintained. Although there were supposed to be two divisions then active, the United States could not have fielded a single brigade equipped and ready for combat.

40. Date of discharge. Late in 1924.

Where were you discharged? West Point, New York.

41. What did you do after you were discharged?

I sought and got employment.

Did you find your military skills or education transferrable to civilian life?

Only in part. I had learned only how to fight, and that was not much in demand at the time.

If the Army sent you to school, please recount your experiences there.

42. What were your expectations of civilian life upon leaving service (post-war America, G-I benefits, educational and career opportunities)?

I expected to resume civilian life and progress with whatever ability I had, without any help.

43. Since the World War I era was a great national experience, did you learn anything about America or Americans?

Americans are inclined to brag about their systems and accomplishments, which may or may not be superior to those of other peoples or cultures.

44. Was your service during World War I of any specific benefit (or detriment) when you returned to civil life?

Military life (particularly combat experiences) had molded and stiffened my character. But it had lessened my sensitivity to the value of human life. That rigidity was detrimental to my career in industry and in my personal life.

45. Do you have any historical material to add to the Military History Institute? 11.

Diaries?

Memoirs?

Letters you wrote home?

Photographs?

Insignia and unit patches?

Books?

Camp and unit newspapers?

Other documents?

I have several war time photographs. I also have a book (not published) in manuscript form, which I wrote regarding my early life, and including every move and engagement of Company G, 16th Infantry, from June, 1917 to August, 1924. I was wounded once, but remained with my company continuously during it's time in Europe.

7. (Continued) The officers who had been in my organization prior to 1917 had been mostly promoted to higher command by the time that I was a recruit and thus out of my field of experience. But later, after I had become more familiar with the workings of some field headquarters and their staffs I saw bungling there also.

(b2)\*\*\*but he could sacrifice any part or all of it when necessary.

(b3) Captain K., in command of our company from September to December of 1917 was totally unsuited to command. He was a graduate of a leading eastern university and highly intelligent, but a coward. During our first contact with the enemy he was a failure and was transferred out of the regiment. I observed several other officers almost as bad.

30.

- (4) Offensive action toward Montdidier. May to June 1918.
- (5) Offensive action toward Soissons France. July 1918.
- (6) A defensive sector on the eastern front. Rest, recuperate and reorganize.
- (7) Offensive action to reduce the St Mihiel salient. September 1918.
- (8) Offensive action in the second and third phase of the Meuse-Argonne battle. October and early November 1918.