

Letters of Nettie Dorothy (Irle) Mills

August 25, 1918
[no envelope]

Dear Father and Mother,

Will answer your letter of a few days ago and glad you folks are all through thrashing. How much did it make?

Have been very busy this week, we have about 8 hundred patient[s] and they take lots of care. We won't be so busy for a while for they moved about 30, 000 men so that leaves camp rather scarce but will move in more in a few weeks.

Our week was taken up by drill every evening and day _____ in the morning. Next week we have gas drill with standing retreat every night at 6⁴⁵. This is a very pretty sight with all the officers, privates, and nurses. The base hospital has the best band in camp. They gave a wonderful concert Wed. eve. Friday the officer in command sent an ambulance to take us over camp and it sure was a wonderful trip, seeing th[eir?] drill, trench, and bayonet practice and all of the thing[s] connected with warfare. Can't tell much about camp so I will not try.

I am in the best of health. Have had all of my shots except one, my small pox did not take.

Haven't received any other mail but expect to in a few days, as I have been so busy have not had time to write.

Haven't been out side camp since I been here so you see how much time we have for the out side world, not even a news paper half the time but one soon gets used to doing with out the unnecessary things.

Have you heard from Anna or either of the boys – I wrote Willie a letter some time ago but received no answer.

Received a notice from Washington that all Red Cross nurses are to have a special out door suit and new coat. The whole equipment will coat about \$125.00. I don't know how they expect us to equip ourselves on \$50 a month. Our white uniforms that we have will also have to be replaced by the regulation uniform.

As news is very scare and am getting sleepy[?] will close “am _____ the after noon off and will have to make use of it.”

Hoping you are well, the same as it leaves me I am as ever your loving Daughter

Nettie

September 1, 1918

[postmarked Rockford, IL - Grant Branch]

Dear Parents,

As I have time will write and explain why I sent such a hurried notice. We were call[ed] in the other day "3 of us" and were told we were selected from the nurses in camp for over sea work and possibly would leave in a couple of days. So their was nothing left to do but make a hurried preparation. We are all ready to go at a minute's notice. Will go to New York and receive out equipment and then to the battle line or near there. This process takes from 2-12 weeks in N.Y. I like my work better [every?] day and am certainly glad I am able to offer my service to the much needed nursing cause. We need thousand[s] of nurses to carry out what is left for us to do. No one realizes what there is to do even in a place like this not even thinking of those poor men who have been in the trenches. There is letters to write for them, keeping them in good spirits, watching for "German propaganda" this is one of our worse draw back[s] "as the old expression goes, some one is always taking the joy out of life." We allow very little war talk in the wards. Seven of our patient[s] are up for court martial for disabling themselves purposely. Some thing to look for all the time. One of our main trouble[s] is people sending in boxes of food, have to watch whether they can leave it or not. Also divide it among the others. We have one poor man who has been in the hospital seven mo. - and not even a little post card does he receive.

Tell the Red Cross people that their work is much needed and to keep up the good work. Our dressings and linens is something terrible just for one day. One almost thinks there is a whole section? in a linen room, when you get in side of it. Our main cry is wash rags, but even our cry for those were satisfied as the Red Cross just received about 50,000 the other day so no more worries in that line for a while. The Red Cross and Y.M.C.C. are two of the most needed

Sept 1, 1918 Cont.

organizations? of the day[;] there would be many of a deserter if not for these two places to go when not on duty. They certainly look after the patient[s'] welfare to a perfection and I know other people as well.

When a patient man is operated on or sick his people receive a telegram notifying them if they come the Red Cross looks after them, shows them just where to go and shows them over camp. So don't think they are doing no good for they are.

The people in Rockford are very good to the nurses. Every Thursday afternoon they take as many as can get off for a boat ride from 2:30 - 5. It certainly is one beautiful trip with a lunch served all free of charge. They also send [cars?] and take us out to dinner. We never have one moment to even think of being lonesome.

As for what I will want for to take with me over sea is a sleeveless sweater "Blue".

Mother please go to my room in town and send my thing[s] from there. I could not get all of them in my trunk when I left there. Need not send any of those dresses but would like the bath robe and a few other articles.

If you like a thermos bottle would be highly appreciated. If any of my heavy under wear is there, also that one pair of pajamas. Oh yes I for got a scarf and _____ of "blue".

If my clothes should come home, that is my civilian things[s] don't be alarmed for that will only mean that I am getting ready to sail. You folks will receive a letter from N.Y. that I write and leave there. When I land it will be sent on to you.

Now don't worry about me for I am going to write as often as possible and you please do the same.

Will be sure and send my correct address as soon as I arrive in N.Y.

Thirty of us leave to gether so don't be worried about my traveling.

Thanks for the money, also the birth certificate as I was afraid I would not get it in time and we have to show it.

My insurance is made out to you Mother; it is for \$10,000. It took so much trouble to make it out to Anna and was against military rules to leave it to anyone but parent Brothers or Sisters so could not do as you wished -

You will receive notice of this insurance so be careful of it and do not lose.

You spoke of military ruling being severe. I don't think they are severe enough. In the army one is placed on their honor and it makes it much better as one is more satisfied.

Must close as I have a bit of washing and packing to do. My iron is allright and much cheaper than the ones I could buy here.

Hoping you are all well as it leave[s] me.

(This letter contains more or less personal matter[s] so please do not let any one read.)

I am as ever your loving daughter

Nettie -

October 23, 1918
Savenay, France

Dear Parents,

Well I am landed safely in another place; we stayed in the last place just one week. Talk about our March weather and rain—well it has nothing on their climate here. I have waded through mud up to my boot tops all the time enjoying it. This is a wonderful place. The scenery is something magnificent, some of the most wonderful chateaux. We went through one that was built 400 B.C.. Also where Napoleon held his prisoners of war. How is everything at home? I suppose you are preparing to husk corn.

Haven't received any mail but am hoping for some any time.

They are very busy. I never knew that one person could do so much in so short a time as it is done over here. Our boys are being well taken care of. This hospital here is even better than most of the hospitals in the states; everything is for the comfort of the patient. You people in the states ask if the Red Cross and Y.M.C.A. are helping over here. If it were not for them I am afraid most of us would be left stranded many times. They sure make life pleasant for us. The only thing we need is more help from the Red Cross. I had a very pleasant voyage over here. Only a little rough one night. Some of the most wonderful moon light nights and those beautiful morning sun rises.

We are in Savenay, France at present, don't know for how long – as our stay is indefinite. But hope we stay here as it is such a pleasant place to be.

Be sure and write often even if you don't hear from me, as letters are just like Xmas presents to us over here.

I can still say a good word for the Army in regards to eating we have the most wonderful meals.

Our menu for yesterday was

Breakfast

Pan cakes

Oat meal

Jam

Bread & Butter

Coffee

Dinner

Potatoes

Veal loaf

Salad: Endive

Bread, Butter, Gravy – Rice

Coffee Cake

Tea

Supper

Fresh fish

Salad: Tomato

Potatoes

Apple pie

Coffee

B.B –

Now this is all[?] for one day, so you see we are not starving by any means. The boys that are patient[s] receive just about the same thing.

Hoping this reaches you safely. With best regards to every one –

I remain,

Your loving daughter

Nettie Dorothy Irlé

Army Nurse Corps

U.S. Base Hospital

Unit 63

A.E.F.

Via New York

November 16, 1918
Savenay, France

Dear Father and Mother,

Will take a few minutes to write you. Am rather cold, so please excuse poor writing. This is the most beautiful country I have ever seen. The flowers are blooming just like it was the middle of the summer. It does not seem possible that thing[s] could look so prosperous as they do for the ground had a thin crust of ice on [it] this AM. They have just put in a new crop of wheat and they tell me it will be harvested about the middle of March.

How is thing[s] at home[?] Did any of you people get the influenza? I hope not for I have seen enough of that stuff to last me forever.

I will try and tell you of the celebration we had of the wide world peace victory. They came in the ward about Mon. and told the boys. Now if you ever heard cheering from human throats those lads certainly cheered. Some of the poor fellows so sick they didn't know whether they were dead or alive sat up in bed and cheered. No one will ever realize except those who have gone through with the hellish war what it has meant to the world.

There was a rumor spread around that we were going back to the Dear Old U.S.A. and take charge of a hospital in Washington D.C.. So you see how happy we all will be if this turn[s] out to be true. They have been told around here that all wounded boys were to be taken back to the U.S.A. first and this would be done in the next three months.

I haven't received any mail as yet but hope to in the near future. Am anxious to hear how every thing is at home.

I go for a long walk every day so that I can get an idea of this beautiful country. M[y] daily average is about 10 kilo[meter]s a day. It does not seem possible that I have been gone 3 months – the time flies so rapidly when one is busy.

I certainly wish you could hear the stories of these boys – when they all get started going over the top they get so excited it is amusing to watch the expressions on their faces.

Every nite about 6 o'clock they get started and the stories they tell would make your hair stand on end.

Another amusing scene is to go down to the village on market day "which is every Wed." and watch them sell their wares. They come from miles around. They all wear wooden shoes – I haven't seen a pair of leather shoes since I have been here.

Well as my time is short I must close for this time. Wishing you a Merry Xmas and a Happy New Year

I am as ever your loving
Daughter Nettie

Nettie Dorothy Irle
Army Nurse Corps
U.S. Base Hospital
Unit 63
A.P.O. 701
American Expeditionary Force
via New York

[postmarked] January 25, 1919
Savenay, France

Dear Father & Mother,

[Received] Your letter of the 26th] Dec., which is the second letter that I have received since m[y] arrival over here. Am enjoying very good health at present. Have felt very good a _____ except on the way over here. You ask if I had the flu. Well I should say I did 3 times. That [sic] m[y] time had come on the way over here. Oh m[y] our boat was just thick[?] with a thousand sick at one time. Maybe you think we didn't work trying to take care of them. Am surely glad that you both have escaped thus far. I was nearly worried sick when I didn't receive any word and knowing it was all over the state. It was not so bad over here as at home & did not prove so fatal.

You say you haven't found where I am located. Am just about 12 miles from St. Naziare, 20 miles from Nante.

Am working pretty hard at present. Am in the amputation ward. Some of them have 8 & 10 dressing[s] and these are dressed every day. When it comes to taking care of 92[?] amputation cases there is some work to be done. Haven't met any one I knew for quite a while. Meet them from all around Illinois but none from Champaign. Was sorry to hear of all the deaths. Poor Mrs. Sommers[?] surly [sic] must feel bad – losing brother, husband, & son. One of the boys just helped another get in the wheel chair. Both have their R legs amputated. One is on crutches pushing the other in the chair. It seems so funny[?] to see a one armed fellow helping one who has lost both of them. They look after one another like a mother of a large family of children. Never a murmur do you hear from any one.

Sunday had m[y] only Marine come down with the mumps; now we are in quarantine. All of them were supposed to go back home this week, now won't get to go before three week[s]. Sure feel sorry for them because they are so anxious to get back and to work[?].

Haven't any souvenir[s] as yet but hope to get some before coming back. Yesterday had a little snow for about 15 min., which is the first thing that looked like home since leaving. Today it is quite cold; this is the second cold spell since our arrival. Don't remember wheather I told you or not what boat we came over on – it was the same one that brought the President. Sure is a wonderful boat[?]. They are sending them home by the thousands. Hope to be there soon m[y] self. Am rather anxious to get back.

Haven't heard a word from sister or either of the boys. In fact no mail at all after my first _____.

Am waiting for dinner. Have plenty to do but that I would rest a minute & write you folks.

Would like to see the _____, also those potatoes Georgie sent. More than seeing would like a few to eat.

Must close & write latter [sic],

Love,

your daughter

April 17, 1919
Camp Hospital 109

Dear Parents,

23 tomorrow – feel myself getting real old. Receive[d] the money the 14th. Now I think that is making real good time. Was going to write sooner but that I would wait untill I got them cashed to see if it was all right. Not a bit of trouble, didn't even have to be deceitful [or dutiful?]. Sure came in handy. Have all my traveling debt payed and plenty left over. Think I shall take another trip to Paris.

Must tell you. M[y] souvenir hunting is beginning to bear fruit. Have an American helmet that a lad 17 years old wore over the top 8 times, a German trench flash light, and 2 German coat buttons. Have the promise of a cap[?] but am not sure of it.

I received your letter in just 15 day[s]. Now I think that is making wonderful time. How are things going back there? My how I should love to get back even just for a few hours. What is Mr. Shumate[?] doing with the children? Has he some one taking care of them? Not much mail this week. Only your letter but look for some any day. Am getting the news right along so that helps a great deal. The girls I think are going to give me a party. You know me for suspecting things. They seem rather sly and keep wanting to know what I am going to be doing Friday night, so expect a little party.

Not much news. Tho same old thing, no working. Only have 3 bed patients in our ward. And they are German prisoners and not being able to understand them of course don't do only what is necessary for them, one advantage of not being able to understand. They are very nice patients and very grateful for what one does for them.

How are the labor questions coming? From all reports they are quite serious.

I wish I could step in for a nice home cooked meal once again. Suppose the trees are all in bloom, the grass nice and green. It has been raining ever since we came back from Italy and quite cold. It sleeted the other day and froze a little. Must close oh[?] yes are going on a 70 mile drive this afternoon through this pretty country. Shall tell you more about it after getting back.

Write soon. I am as ever your

loving Daughter Nettie

P.S. Am sending a package home of a few little thing[s] that I have collected and been given. Please save them for me untill I get home as I want them.

May 11, 1919
Mother's Day
Vannes, France

Dear Mother,

Am waiting orders to go to Brest, where we will be ordered home. Expect to be there in 2 weeks. Certainly will be glad, am getting quite tired of this Army life. Left our base the 1st of the month – have been here in Vannes ever since. A very pretty place, a quaint old Brittany town. On Sunday after noon it is quite a treat to go down the street an[d] see them in their old costumes.

Expect to leave here tomorrow, spent 4 days to a week in Brest – then to N. Y., where it takes from 2-3 weeks to get our discharge.

How goes the thing[s] at home? No mail in quite a while but will soon be back where we can get our mail in a few days.

This is Mother's Day, all people in the A.E.F. are supposed to write their mothers. No news so letter will be short.

Will be home soon and tell ___ all which will be better than writings,

_____ your Daughter
Nettie