

**The Library of America • Story of the Week**

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*Headnote by A. Scott Berg.*

## Waiting for the Armistice

HARRY S. TRUMAN

To compensate for his poor vision, Harry S. Truman of Independence, Missouri, had allegedly memorized the eye chart so that he could join the National Guard in 1905. He left the Guard in 1911 but rejoined when America entered the war. Commissioned as a captain, he commanded a battery of 188 men in the 129th Field Artillery Regiment, 35th Infantry Division, and saw action in the Vosges, St. Mihiel, and in the Meuse-Argonne campaign. While Marshal Foch waited in a railroad car in the forest of Compiègne for the German delegation to sign the Armistice, Truman wrote to Bess Wallace, his fiancée in Missouri. On June 28, 1919, seven weeks after his discharge from the army, they would marry.

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Nov 10, 1918

Dear Bess:—

I got a letter today from Boxley and one from Joe Bielsford who was our auditor in Morgan and Company and none from you. I am disappointed as a kid who didn't get any candy but I know that Uncle Sam's mail and not you are to blame and maybe I'll get one or two or three tomorrow. I am still holding down a place in a quiet sector and I'm getting fat on it. Also that helmet is *not* going to make me bald headed, at least I don't think so.

The Hun is yelling for peace like a stuck hog and I hope old daddy Foch makes him yell louder yet or throttles him one. Throttling would be too easy. When you see some of the things those birds did and then hear them put up the talk they do for peace it doesn't impress you at all. A complete and thorough thrashing is all they've got coming and take my word they are getting it and getting it right.

This has been a beautiful Sunday. The sun shining and as warm as summer. It sure made me wish for Lizzie and five gallons of gas with her nose pointed down Blue Ridge Blvd. and me stepping on the throttle to get there quickly. I wonder

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how long it will be before we do any riding down that road. Easter? Maybe if not sooner. Heine seems to be about finished. Just to make the day interesting one of thier planes came over and shot down one of our sausage balloons and came near getting shot down him self. I shot away about 500 rounds of high explosive shells my self. Not at the plane but at some Hun machine guns about seven miles away. I don't know if I hit them but I have hopes as I laid the guns very carefully. A Hun plane dropped some bomb not far from my back yard last night and sort of shook things up. They made him run home in a hurry too. There is a big railroad gun about a kilometer behind me that shoots about every fifteen minutes and I heard one of the boys remark that "There goes another rolling kitchen over to pulverize Jerry." The projectile makes a noise like a wagon going down the road when it goes through the air so the remark was very good.

I have been censoring letters today and it is some job. I had no idea that there were so many accomplished liars in any organization on earth as I have in mine. They are eternally trying to get by the censor with some big talk of thier heroism and accomplishments in this war and they do it too sometimes, especially if they put in something nice about thier commanding officer and the part he took in the tale. Usually though I have to tear 'em up or send them back when they tell too much or stretch the truth even beyond literary licence. Some of them write very good and very interesting letters and some of them do not. It is a job to censor them and when my Lts get too far behind I help them out.

I hope the base censor doesn't laugh at mine as I sometimes have to at thiers.

Hope I get that letter tomorrow. Also Hope the Hun signs the peace agreement. Write as often as you can to one who thinks of you

Always  
Harry.

Harry S Truman  
Capt 129 FA  
American E.F.

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Nov. 11, 1918

Dear Bess:—

I know Uncle Samuel was holding out on me when your letter came not with Boxley's and Bielsford's. Two came this morning and I am of course very happy. We are all wondering what the Hun is going to do about Marshal Foch's proposition to him. We don't care what he does. He's licked either way he goes. For my part I'd as soon be Provost-Marshall of Cologne or Metz or Munich or Berlin as have any other job I know of now. It is a shame we can't go in and devatate Germany and cut off a few of the Dutch kids hands and feet and scalp a few of thier old men but I guess it will be better to make them work for France and Belgium for fifty years.

Thier time for acceptance will be up in 30 minutes. There is a great big 155 battery right behind me across the road that seems to want to get rid of all of its ammuniton before the time is up. It has been banging away almost as fast as a 75 battery for the last two hours. Every time one of the guns goes off it shakes my house like an earth quake.

I just got official notice that hostilities would cease at 11 o'clock. Everyone is about to have a fit. I fired 164 rounds at him before he quit this morning, anyway. It seems that everyone was just about to blow up wondering if Heine would come in. I knew that Germany could not stand the gaff. For all thier preparedness and swashbuckling talk they cannot stand adversity. France was whipped for four years and never gave up and one good licking suffices for Germany. What pleases me most is the fact that I was lucky enough to take a battery through the last drive. The battery has shot something over 10000 rounds at the Hun and I am sure they had a slight effect.

I am returning the enclosure from the K.C. Post. It is a good thing I didn't censor Bill's letter or I probably would have thrown it out. It was evidently not quoted correctly even as it is. He was promoted for bravery by me but he was not mentioned in orders. Of course the remark about his Captain is pleasing but there are no vacant sergeancies now so he won't get promoted for that.

It is pleasant also to hear that Mrs. Wells has adopted me as a real nephew and I shall certainly be more than pleased to call

her Auntie Maud and I hope it won't be long before I can do it.

You evidently did some very excellent work as a Liberty Bond saleswoman because I saw in the "Stars & Stripes" where some 22000000 people bought them and that they were over-subscribed by \$1000 000 000 which is some stunt for you to have helped pull off. I know that it had as much to do with breaking the German morale as our cannon shots had and we owe you as much for an early home coming as we do the fighters.

Here's hoping to see you soon

Yours always  
Harry

Harry S. Truman  
Capt FAUSA