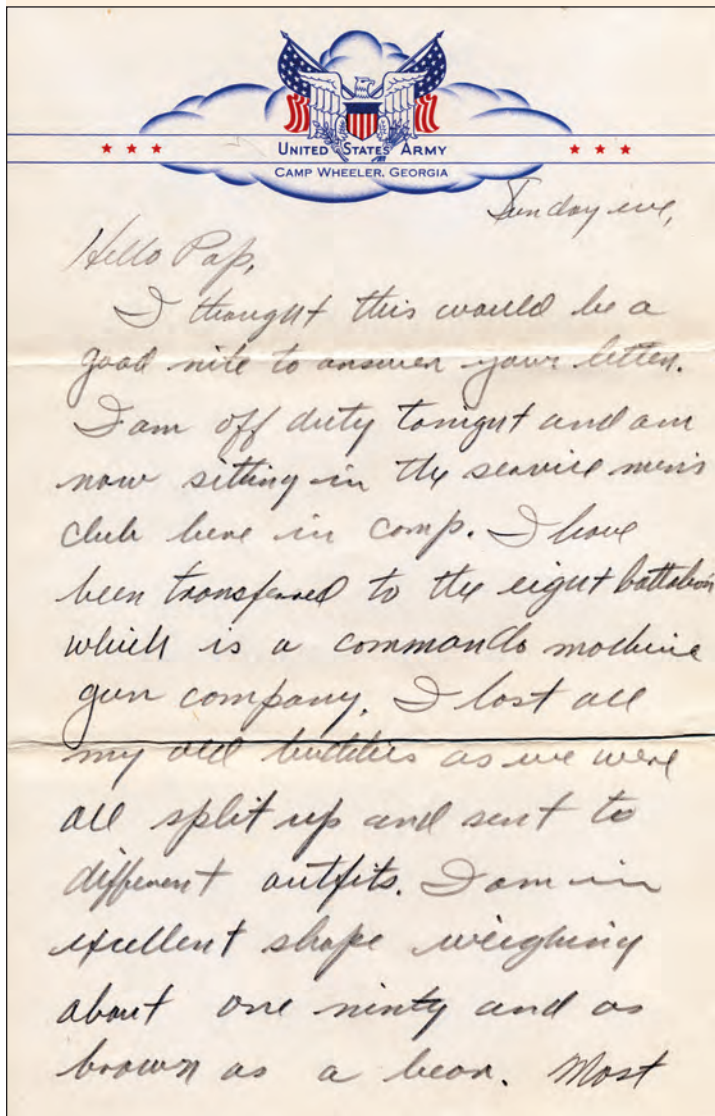


# FROM THE FRONT II

## DEAR POP



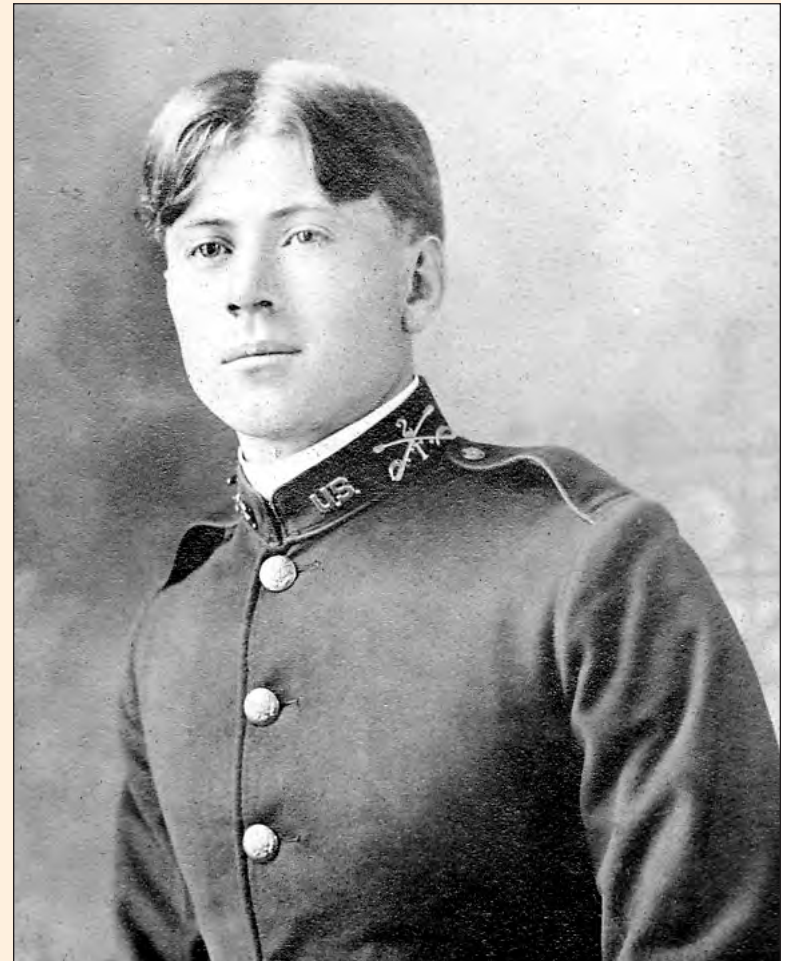
Gericke's Drug Store at Fifth and Marie Avenues in South St. Paul was a popular hangout for teenagers. After the United States entered World War II, many of the young men who frequented the soda fountain made time in their busy lives to write letters to druggist Julius Gericke, familiarly known as "Pop."

Gerald Hunt wrote, "Well, are the boys, I mean that are left are they still coming around? If they are say hello, and tell them to have a drink for me. Tell the boys they don't know how nice it is to sit up there and drink a coke. Don't get the idea that I'm homesick, but I miss some of those things."

## GROVER COOPER

Born in the state of Virginia in 1885, Grover Cooper was a member of a select group of soldiers, the U.S. Cavalry. In 1906, along with his brother Dan, he enlisted in Montgomery, West Virginia for a three-year term of service. As a member of the 2nd Regiment, Troop I, Cooper participated in escorting Ute Indian tribal members who, despite U.S. Government opposition, traveled to South Dakota in 1906 and 1907. By 1908, Cooper's regiment was stationed at Fort Snelling, Minnesota and he eventually served out the rest of his enlistment at Fort. Des Moines, Iowa, where he received an honorable discharge on April 20, 1909.

After his military service, Grover Cooper went to work for the Omaha Railroad. He married Helen Benke of Eagan Township in 1912 and settled in West St. Paul where they raised their four daughters, Lillian, Helen, Edith, and Keren. Cooper was a resident of West St. Paul for over 58 years.



## MARY DIFFLEY

Mary Diffley was 42 years old when she joined the Army Nurse Corps in June 1942. She did not join the Nurse Corps to enjoy the opportunities to travel, the economic security it provided, or the pleasant social life. She joined to serve.

Growing up in Eagan, she had attended a rural school at Wescott and later graduated from the St. Joseph's School of Nursing in St. Paul. She had become a registered nurse in 1926, perfecting her nursing and leadership skills as a nurse supervisor while living in San Francisco, California. When the war began, Uncle Sam needed skilled registered nurses aged 21 to 45, college-educated or graduates of approved nursing schools, in a hurry. Six months after the war began, Diffley enlisted, was commissioned a major, and was assigned as Chief Nurse.

She served in Southern France, Sicily, Rome, Arno, and Germany, often close to the battle near the front lines. Her plucky character, courage, and devoted care for the wounded and dying earned her the Bronze Star for valor.



## LUCILLE BIRCHEN

In May of 1917, one month after the United States entered World War I, the Mayo Clinic and the University of Minnesota were asked by the U.S. government to organize a base hospital to be built in Allerey, France. Utilizing the American Red Cross Nursing Services, the university called for trained nurses to serve at what would become Base Hospital 26. One of these nurses was Lucille Birchen, a 23-year-old registered nurse from Hastings.

After receiving military nursing training stateside, Birchen began her duties in France in June 1918. Base Hospital 26 was known for its exceptionally skilled medical personnel and throughout the war they received the most serious surgical cases. There were never enough nurses so Birchen endured 11-hour work days with little free time. A caption from her scrapbook documenting her experience in Allerey sums up a typical day at the hospital: “We eat and drink and sleep and work and think we do no more.”

Because of the intensity of her work schedule, Lucille rarely had the opportunity to write home. She returned home in July 1919 and went back to work as a nurse in St. Paul before moving to Florida in 1928.

