

Genesee, Idaho

Feb. 17, 1948

Mr. Neil A. Martin

Boise, Idaho

Dear Comrade:

During the past two months I received three letters from the V. A. office and one from you regarding my claims for disability but I hardly know what to say.

Perhaps I had better start from the beginning when the United States declared war in 1917. I was living in Spokane, Washington, and I "registered" there. At the time I was attending the Northwestern Business College and was graduated from the commercial course by July 1, when I received my diploma. The President of the college, M. M. Higley, recommended me to the Northern Pacific Railway office in Spokane where I applied for a position in the clerical department.

After being admitted to the manager's office and a detailed questioning, the manager gave me an offer of \$65.00 per month to start and an opportunity for advancement. I told the manager that I would "sleep" on it and report the following morning.

On the way back to my apartment I saw soldiers marching to entrain for distant camps, bands playing and the usual wartime hubbub. All this stirred within my breast a patriotic urge to give Uncle Sam the first chance at my services and I could hardly wait for morning to come to decline the Northern Pacific Railway's offer.

After reporting, I contacted some of my classmates of the college and proposed we enlist. They were all farm boys, as was I, and felt that they should aid their parents in the harvest and fall-work due to the shortage of farm labor, so we agreed to meet in the following December. Five of us were registered in the same district, and after studying the various branches of the Service, we decided on the Air Corps because the recruiting officer told us that we would be given the opportunity to further our education after serving our country.

Note that it was a voluntary enlistment for my number – 1245 – didn't come out of the "basket" until about the middle of 1918.

We were stationed in the sand dunes of flu-infested, tent-flapping, Kelly Field for thirteen days and on New Year Day we were transferred out after spending the last night on cots with one blanket in a large sheet-iron hanger. Men were dying like rats all around us and some of our men of "line 13" were later in the hospital at Waco and some froze their ears and fingers in the sub-zero weather at Waco, Texas. I contracted the flu at the time and couldn't speak above a whisper for over two weeks. I reported on sick-roster and, after telling my tale of woe to the M.D. in the whisper, he gave me a dirty look and, with a sneer, said "35-46 take two of these every two hours and a light dose of salts over there in the corner, you are marked "duty"".

All of this time I was still in civilian clothes since there were no uniforms available and I had light weight clothes but I did bring an overcoat. I had written home for added clothing which was sent to me at Kelly Field, as were many other things from home, but with a huge warehouse bulging with mail sacks, nothing was delivered nor returned to the sender out of that muddle. But thanks to Captain Baker at Waco, after seeing my plight, he gave me a heavy warm sweater that he had in his office. He was an "old army captain" and a swell guy, not a ninety-day wonder.

Cold as it was, our tent-flap had to be open and I piled all of my clothes on my bed including my shoes which did add weight after all. More than one morning I had to stand reveille after putting on shoes out of which I emptied the snow which blew in during the night ---believe it or not.

Things were beginning to form some faster now and, before the end of March, we were well on our way to England on an English ship---Celtic by name. that was another "death-trap". Everyone was sick with dysentery and, with inadequate facilities to accommodate the "urge", the ship became a sickly mess of stench. Three men died enroute and I was in a formation to witness the burial of one at sea.

Once in England and assigned to an English camp at Beverley, I began training in the "Sail-makers" department. If my service records are available you may see that I spent a great share of my time in the "dope-shop" processing the fabric of the planes with a liquid celluloid in a room which was heated to a temperature not under 95°F. Half of such time spent was on night shift and then the day was so disrupted on account of the "regular day-time clamour" that I got no rest at all with eyes almost swelled shut from the fumes of the "dope". We are given a quart of milk daily to counteract the poison, and a chest examination every week to ascertain the lung condition. Out of the 247th Aero Squadron, I am the only one who did not ask for release from this hazardous occupation. Every last man was "washed out" but myself before we "shipped out" to France in November 1918.

Along with these conditions, the food situation was bad. We were on English rations of brown bread from which we all got the "bread rash", goat meat and New Zealand rabbit which was so near decay that it fell off of the bones. (This condition the Englishmen called "ripe".) those on K.P. would skin the rabbits---we had to turn the skins in to "H.M. King"---but the meat carcasses we buried in back of the mess shack because we couldn't eat it.

Once in France, however, we got good food and good old American and French white bread, making the stay there not bad only the suspense of being detained when we could do no more to win the war after the Armistice.

I became a free man on March 25, 1919, and if I had a record of each spell of sickness since then until now, it would be almost beyond belief. I have been hospitalized several times but more often, I was fighting it out at home under the care of a doctor and the most of my ailments were of the nature of flu, pneumonia, abcess on the lung and tuberculosis which is arrested for the time.

On November 24, 1929, I was cracked down with an ailment which the attending physician, Dr. A.J. White, of Genesee could not diagnose. Some time after the evening meal about 10 p.m., I retired for the day not feeling very well and in about half an hour I was siezed with a severe attack of vomiting and a water diarrhea and muscular convulsions over my entire body from which I got no relief until the doctor administered hypodermic injections. I was taken up for a warm bath but collapsed and was back to bed, heavily padded, to absorb the "run-off". My system became so completely dehydrated that for over a day I lay prostrate and oblivious of my surroundings while water was given me to refill the dried out tissues.

After a few days I rallied sufficiently to be up a little but I just could not recover from the onslaught. In the meantime my wife was making arrangements for me to enter the V.A. hospital at Walla Walla, Washington. She engaged Dr. J.E. Baldeck of Lewiston, Idaho, to get "squared away" with Walla Walla for an emergency case which he agreed to do and, so on December 3, Dr. Baldeck engaged for an ambulance with Vassar-Rawls of Lewiston, who came to my farm home from which I went by ambulance to Walla Walla, Wash., V.A. Hospital. I was a patient there until about March 15, 1940, when I was sent home with M.H.B. I understood that I'd had a sinus infection and at first had very high temperatures which prevailed for about three months and gradually decreasing until I became normal. (My hospital records likely are available).

After I came home I received a bill from Vassar-Rawls for the ambulance trip which was not accepted by the hospital. I tired through the Legion and Dr. Baldeck to get things ironed out by was unsuccessful, and not able to pay the charge myself which still stands against me. We were in good faith in going to the hospital and the care to which I was entitled but something slipped While I was a patient at Walla Walla I had an interview with a "contact" man there who gave me no consideration whatever. And why should he? After all he was working for Uncle Sam and against me.

I never became strong again and suffered a/c severe headache continually. I was always under the care of a doctor and was being treated for sinus trouble and anemia with both sprays and capsules, without noticeable benefit. In 1943 I was taken to a Lewiston hospital a/c pneumonia and was confined at home periodically for his and that.

In 1946 I again came to a point where I needed extended hospital care and through Dr. C.J. Klaaren of Moscow, Idaho, I was admitted to Farragut under the V.A. on march 21, 1946. My records from there are probably available and will show that I was confined in a cubicle with another T.B. patient. When this hospital area fold-up on May 30, 1946, I was transferred to Madigan General Hospital at Fort Lewis, Wash., where I was confined in a small room in "T.B Alley" where men were dying and one negro across a four-foot hall passed away two days before I was transferred to Seattle Navy Hospital, June 6, 1946. My records and x-rays will also show my condition while at Madigan.

I still don't know what to say because I have tried twice before for compensation and don't think for a minute that I didn't need it with a family of eleven children and the wife and I both barely able to drag and with the price of farm commodities far below the cost of production until the law few years.

Just because I wouldn't grossly exaggerate or lie about conditions, the V.A. has beaten me out of a little just compensation repeatedly even after neighbors of mine filed affidavits as to my condition.

During my last hospitalization at Madigan, Fort Lewis, and the naval hospital at Seattle, I was interviewed by V.A. representative and in each instance it was clear that they tried to disqualify me. I told them so too. In substance, I said "O.K., so I'll answer your questions, but I don't expect a damn thing from you. Uncle Sam is paying you to see how many of us poor devils you can beat out of it." The guy of Seattle called on me just before I was discharged and told me that I had no claim since my T.B. was arrested.

When discharged at Seattle about July 1, 1946, the doctor prescribed six months complete rest but I couldn't quite make myself do that so I drove truck hauling grain from the combine, etc., while my sons did the harvesting. By the way, I had three sons in this war, the oldest, Bob, was a 2nd Lieutenant Pilot who had bombing missions over Honshu in a B-25 (Billy Mitchell) before Japan folded up and afterward, he was flying an A-26 on reconnaissance flight over Korea. It was on the return trip after one of these missions that he was forced down in the China Sea and died, May 16, 1946.

The second son, James, was a Chief Radio Technician on the Saginaw Bay with five battle stars, Leyte, Linguyan, etc.

The third son, John, enlisted at age 17 but did not get out of the United States. He was an A. M. M. 3/c.

James came home in February and John in July, 1946, and these two took charge of affairs at home while I just lay around and gave directions of procedure. I haven't done a lick of work of any consequence and when I did try certainly paid for it.

Long before World War #2 I met men who were drawing compensation, some of whom had no dependents and were as physically fit as I. It was the easy way out through an unconscientious claim and just pure "gold-bricking" that is all.

Isn't it a fact that all Spanish Americans War Vets. are drawing a pension, regardless of any disability whatsoever? I know of several cases myself and one in particular. This one man is only eight years my senior and has two grown children. He has been engaged in a paying little business for at least 35 years and does all of his own work concerning it. He has been drawing \$60.00 per month for many years and I believe that now his monthly pay is \$90.00. he is sixty-eight while I am sixty years old.

How much more deserving are these lads with a few months in the Philippines than we who served in World War II even the boys in the late war have opportunities galore in the G.I Bill of Rights.

When we were discharged we received \$60.00 so that we could get back into "civvies". My first suit alone put me back \$70.00 but I went right to work on a farm---my business opportunities were gone--- and earned the wherewith for additional clothes.

We could not lay away a lot of money while in the service because we didn't get much in the first place.

Now get me straight, I'm not griping about my service, my fare while serving, nor my service pay and, as I said in the beginning, I turned my back on all of my loves and voluntarily offered my services to my dear Country which security I deemed at state. I do not intimate by my inferences that I want pay for my patriotism but I do feel that my occasional protracted illness since my return to civil life are a direct result of the stress that my respiratory organs were put to in the service which I gladly gave to my Country and, after all of my reverses and my disabilities and after giving my Country eleven wonderful future Americans that I should be entitled to a small compensation in my declining years.

Sincerely yours,

HML:BLK

Robert Henry Sept 25-1920

James John " 8-1921

Joan G. Mar 25-1924

John J. July 7-1926

Mary F. " 4 1927

Mary Jean Jan 28-1929

Peter D. Feb 15-1930

Lois C. July 15-1931

Mary Alice Mar 31-1933

Albert W. June 23-1934

Rita N. Nov 24-1937