



# Cantigny First Division Foundation

First Division Museum at Cantigny  
Colonel Robert R. McCormick Research Center

Dear Educator,

This binder is a compilation of 28 of the letters Max Ottenfeld wrote home to his family during his tour of duty as part of the American Expeditionary Forces during and after WWI. The letters depict his experiences, lifestyle, and training as a soldier in WWI. It is meant to give students an opportunity to handle primary sources while studying the Great War. The letters are to encourage deeper critical thinking about the war and a more affective understanding about the experiences of people during this time in history.

The letters have been transcribed to make it easier for the reader to decipher. They are printed in two different fonts. This is to show the difference between when Max was handwriting a letter and when he was able to use a typewriter. The letters that were written on stationery will have the stationery headers scanned onto the top of the letter.

These letters can be used however you feel will best fit with your Unit.

Here are some options for using the letters:

- Use the letters as part of an anticipatory set each morning. You could read them aloud, and have the students discuss them as a class or in small groups. The following pages have focusing question suggestions, and ideas for connecting lessons.
- Break the class into groups and assign a letter to each group. This can be done as a scramble, and each group can present the content of their letter and answers to questions.

Additional resources included with the letters are:

- A definitions list for words and phrases Max uses in the letters that modern day students may not know.
- Questions about each letter to use as a review and to generate conversation about how students would react to the obstacles Max faced.
- A breakdown in the content of each letter along with the questions.
- Photographs and postcards that connect to the letters

Here is some background information on Max Ottenfeld:

Max was born in Chicago and raised in Madison, WI. He joined the US Army in November 1917 when he was just 17 years old. Max's journey in the army took him to the Jefferson Barracks in Missouri, to Camp McArthur in Waco, TX, to Camp Merritt in New Jersey, and finally he was shipped off to the Western Front of WWI. While at Camp McArthur, Max went to signal school to learn different styles of communication equipment the soldiers used during the war. Max's company is initially stationed in England. While in England he was sent to additional communication training before being shipped to the front lines in France.

*Please note: Remember that these items are related to war. Look over the items for anything you might consider inappropriate for your classroom.*

If have any questions about these letters, please contact the Museum Educator at [mtyer@firstdivisionmuseum.org](mailto:mtyer@firstdivisionmuseum.org) or (630) 260-8274. Please give us feedback on these resources by filling out the evaluation form in the history trunk binder.

Thank you,

First Division Museum at Cantigny Education Department