

World War One

Max Ottenfeld Letter Definitions

#5

Drilling (or Drill)

Drills train soldiers to march and use weapons. Discipline, repetition, and exercise are used as mean of teaching and perfecting skills and procedures.

Signal School

A type of message, the text of which consists of one or more letters, words, characters, signal flags, visual displays, or special sounds with prearranged meaning, and which is conveyed or transmitted by visual, acoustical, or electrical means.

Semaphore

A visual system for sending information by means of two flags that are held one in each hand, using an alphabetic code based on the position of the signaler's arms.

Wig-Wag

A signal carried out by waving an upraised arm, flag, or light, especially in accordance with a code.

Dot and Dash Codes

Using a set system of dots and dashes to interpret the alphabet to send information and communicate.

“kop in the kisges”

Max was referring to the recoil of the shotgun. If the weapon is not held properly when it is fired, the butt of the shotgun will strike the jaw-line leaving the shooter with a bruise.

Drafted men

The draft is the recruitment of qualified citizens in military service. Max is making a distinction between men who volunteer for military service and those who are drafted in.

Allotment

A portion of the paycheck that went to savings, family, or somewhere else depending on what the soldier decided.

“Shluf”

This is another word for lazy. Max is explaining how there is not much to do around camp, so he is being lazy, hanging around, and generally not accomplishing much.

“Geldt”

This is a German word for withdrawing money.

#6

Pathe machine

This is a type of record player.

Miniola, Long Island, New York

Correct spelling: Mineola. It is a village on the west side of Long Island.

#8

“Switzed”

This is a slang word for sweat.

Bluzing

This is a slang word for gusting wind.

Poofin

This is a possible reference to dreaming or snoring.

Shmorce

A slang term for mooch or sweet-talk. Max is using his persuasive skills to get food from the cook.

Signal “Spitooon”

This is the Sergeant’s personal nickname for the Signal Platoon.

Gruben

This is a slang term for doing undesirable work. Gruben could also be an extension from “grub”. Grub is a nickname for a person with a low status and gruben could be the work the grub does.

#13

Telegram

This is a message transmitted by telegraph (wire).

Muster

To call troops together for inspection.

Hippodrome

Originally, the hippodrome was an arena or open-air stadium with an oval course for horse races typically built in ancient Greece and Rome. The Hippodrome in New York was the name of the playhouse Max attended to see the theatrical production, *Cheer Up*.

Vaudeville Theatre

Correct spelling: Vaudville. Stage entertainment that offers a variety of short acts, such as: comedy, song-and-dance, or talent acts.

Quarantined

Isolating or restricting the movement of some people to prevent the spread of contagious diseases for a certain period of time.

#16

Censors

Max is referring to the censors who are the people who perform the act of censoring the mail. This censoring is part of a security procedure placed on outgoing personal mail of enlisted men. The purpose is to prevent too much information that could endanger missions or troops from being intercepted by the enemy.

Embarkation

The process of putting personnel, vehicles, supplies and equipment into ships and/or aircraft in order to prepare for the mission. “Point of embarkation” refers to the area where the ships and aircraft are being load with supplies and personnel and the send-off place for these vessels.

Lusitania

Max is referring to the *Lusitania*, a British ship, which was sunk by a German U-boat in 1915. The *Lusitania* was cruise ship carrying civilians and U.S. military supplies to the British forces.

Artillery Unit

This is a branch of an army that specializes in the use of large-caliber weapons, such a cannons, howitzers, and missile launchers.

Jitney

This is a North American term used to refer to a vehicle like a taxi or a bus. It typically holds a maximum of seven people. The jitney usually follows a general route, although it can make short detours to pick up and drop off passengers.¹

Pence

A British coin worth 1/100 of a pound.

Shilling

A British coin worth 1/20 of a pound.

Franc

A French coin.

Barrack

A building used to house military personnel, usually temporarily.

Casual Co. (company)

Military slang term for a camp or company that is not used for soldiers in combat. The casual camp is not a camp that is necessarily going to be in combat or near it.

#18

¶ Sign

This is a punctuation symbol for the start of a new paragraph. Max was using a typewriter when he used this symbol, and instead of creating a new paragraph he used this symbol where normally a new paragraph would begin.

Sow-belly

This is another name for salt pork given to the soldiers. The meat was usually salted for flavor and preserving.

#32

Chateau

This is an impressive country house (or castle) in France.

Reveille

This is the sounding of the bugle in the morning to awaken the men and get into the first formation of the day (a.k.a. roll call and daily assignments).

Ducking

To submerge the head or body briefly in water like a duck.

Billet – Same as barrack (#16)

Another word for a military building used to house men temporarily.

Payroll

This is the monthly payment of services.

¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jitney>

Telegraph

The telegraph is a communication system that transmits and receives simple electric impulses.

Cranium

Max is referring to his skull that encases his brain.

Dubonnet or Saloons

These places could also be called a tavern. They are all social places that sell alcohol.

Sore

Synonym: angry, unhappy. Max is referring to his hurt feelings because he did not receive as many pancakes as the other men did.

Breeches

These are trousers (pants) that end above the knee.

Wrap leggings

These are made out of wool, leather, or canvas material, and cover the area between the ankle and knee worn by soldiers.

#37

Francs

Max is referring to French coins. During WWI the purchasing power of the French franc was greatly reduced. In order to cover war expenses the French government printed lots of francs and drove the purchasing power of the franc down by 70 percent between the years 1915 and 1920.²

#40

Outfit

An outfit is a unit such as a military company. Max is referring to his Headquarters Company and the First Division.

“Over the ‘tops’”

Max is referring to trench warfare and how the soldiers exit the trenches, go through no mans land, and attempt to overtake the enemy trenches.

J/P.S.

This is an acronym for joint processing system.

#45

“On this side of the pond”

Max is referring to the Atlantic Ocean as the “pond” and the fact that he and his outfit are across the ocean and away from their families in the United States.

Kaiser

This is the title of the emperor of Germany until 1918. During WWI, Kaiser Wilhelm II was the leader Germany.

Fritzs

World War One soldiers sometimes referred to the German soldiers as “Fritzs”. Fritz was also a shortened name for Friedrich, which was a common German name.

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_franc#World_War_I

Receivers

This is an electronic device, such as a part of a radio or telephone, which receives incoming signals and converts them to perceptible forms, such a sound.

Dialect

This is a variety of a language that is used by a specific region.³

Lingo

This refers to the unique characteristics of a language in a particular group.

Hospitable

To treat a guest in a hospitable manner is to treat them with warmth and generosity.

Novelty

A novelty is something new and unusual.

#56

Kuchen

This is a German coffeecake.

“Co. G. men”

Company G men or government workers

#60

Chaplain

A member of the clergy who is attached to a branch of the armed forces who conducts religious services.

Humps

Max is probably referring to cigarettes.

Convalescence ward

Floor or section of the hospital that holds patients who are gradually returning to health and strength after an illness, injury, or surgical operation.

#61

Diphtheria

An infectious disease that causes difficulty breathing, high fever, and weakness that is contagious.

Monotonous

No variety or change in daily activities.

“chew the rag”

To meditate or ponder or in thought.

#63

“Raking over the coals”

Severely reprimanded or scolded.

Breeches (see #32)

Leggings (see #32)

³ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialect>

#64

Moving pictures

Early films or movies.

Charlie Chaplin

English comedian and film maker during the early 1900's.

#67

Remischer bader

Correct spelling: romischer bader. Is either a cemetery or aqueducts built in ancient Rome.

Kaiserpalast-Roman Bath

Romans built huge buildings to impress subjects and visitors that contained many luxurious pools. They were used for entertainment, healing, or to clean themselves.

War restrictions

At home, everyday items such as: flour, sugar, vegetables, meat, nylons, and soap were used sparingly in order to save for the troops abroad.

#70

Cameo Ring

A gem or shell carved in relief and fashioned on a ring.

#76

Influenza or flu

The influenza pandemic of 1918-1919 was also called the "Spanish Flu". It is said to have killed more people across the globe than combat in WWI.⁴

Pneumonia

Pneumonia is an infection of the lungs, and is often contracted after a person has been sick for a while and their defense systems have been weakened.

M.P.'s

This is an acronym for Military Police.

#84

Satchel

A satchel is another word for a small bag.

Billeted

A soldier being billeted is given temporary housing.

#87

Soft job

A soft job is another way of saying an easy job.

Pfennig

This is a small unit of German currency, like the American penny.⁵

Pinched

To be pinched is to be robbed.

⁴ <http://virus.stanford.edu/uda/index.html>

⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pfennig>

#91

Vaudeville show

Theatrical variety shows popular at the end of the 19th Century and early 20th Century.

General

Armistice

A state of peace agreed to between opponents so they can discuss peace terms.

YMCA

Abbreviation for Young Men's Christian Association. The American YMCAs during WWI ran the military canteens (cafeteria, recreational facility, or small general store) and led fundraising campaigns for YMCA operations and other war time causes.

KC

Abbreviation for Knights of Columbus. The KCs had a similar function as the YMCA for the soldiers as providing recreational activities.

Stars and Stripes

Newspaper written and printed by WWI soldiers for the soldiers to alleviate stress and provide information.