

[*N.B.: The United States Congress declared war on Germany on April 6, 1917*]

[Letter #1]

Utica, N.Y. – 4/9 – 17 [Monday]

Dear Maureen:

As I promised to let you know what happened last night I'll try to do so before I go to sleep. After leaving you I went home and woke them [his brothers] up. But it was the same dead-lock that happened in the morning; only worse. For some of them had been out with their girls and were feeling ugly as if they hadn't been treated very good. And the rest were ugly from booze so I couldn't get it settled either way. Lou was the most level-headed one of the lot. So he decided to settle it today one way or the other and let me know tomorrow.

So I had to come back to this lonesome hole [Utica] again. The train was an hour and a half late so I didn't get here till after 8. And I wasn't in the place 2 minutes before I handed in my unconditional resignation to take effect as soon as possible. It took them by surprise you can bet. For I think they thought I was only bluffing before. As they burned the wires letting Syracuse know of it. And they got a wire right back that the chief would be down and see me tomorrow.

So I am looking for a stormy session tomorrow. It may be worse than going to war. But I should worry as 2 weeks is the very longest notice they can coax me to give them. And I wouldn't give that if I didn't have to. I only hope I won't lose my head and tell them to go to H—right off the reel for I've lost more than I ever gained by saying that same thing.

It's sure been the devil's own day in Utica today. There has been a cold raw wind blowing all day and this evening it started to snow as well. Why I haven't been warm since Sunday noon. That's why I'm writing with a pencil again. I'm sitting about 4 feet from the stove and shaking like a leaf. So I couldn't use ink if I wanted to –

Mary I'd like to write about 16 pages tonight just to tell you how nice you are and how much I think of you but to tell you the truth if I don't cut this short I'll go to sleep and then you would get no letter tomorrow. So I'll stop and mail it while I'm able to walk to the mail-box. You may be sure I'll see you in two weeks if not before. As I couldn't come to Rochester and keep away from you. As it is you haven't been long out of my mind since I left you last night, or should I say this morning. It beats the devil what a difference a few hours will make. About 20 hours ago I was enjoying the society of the prettiest and nicest girl in the world and now I'm back in lonesome old Utica and all alone at that.

Say a prayer for me Mary and depend upon it I'll pray hard for your happiness, much more than I ever dared pray for my own. Be sure and answer soon; so it will get here before I'm somewhere else. Good night and "May God Bless You" is the fervent wish of Your Friend

John T. McGuire

[Letter #2]

Utica, N.Y. 4/15 – 17 [Sunday]

Dear Friend Maureen:

Your welcome bit of news arrived Thursday. And although I was glad to hear from you (and always will be) there was nothing new to tell you so I didn't answer before for all I could have written was how nice I think you are and I'm afraid you will soon get sick of that. Even if it is the truth. But when I'm away in the army, maybe you will realize that I'm not shooting hot air.

The chief was prevented from getting here that day and has not got here yet. But that's not going to prevent me from leaving here next Saturday, never to come back.

I only hope that some of them slob brothers of mine will stay at home for by the way I feel tonight I'd like to fight a whole German army. Even if I didn't last 10 seconds. I've felt so discouraged all week that I don't know what I'm doing. And lonesome is no name for it. All there is in this town is booze. And one can't hit that up all the time.

You say that I can keep away from you if I get back there and that I'll soon forget you. But Mary I count you as one of the few friends I've left on earth and the best one at that. And I hope and pray that nothing will ever come between us. If so I am sure it won't be my fault. I am not sure ~~whether~~ what I will do if I don't get into the army. But I'm sure I'll not starve for I never was out of work long at any time let alone now when jobs are plentiful. But with the help of the lord I'll see my dear friend Mary next week.

Answer as soon as you can and be sure a line from you will always be welcomed by your Friend.

J.T. McGuire

Good night and may God Bless you. J.T.M.

Please excuse scribbling. J.T.M.

[Letter #3]

Utica, N.Y. 4/23 – 17 [Monday]

Dear Friend Mary:

Your welcome letter was received Thursday and as I was sure I was coming home Saturday I didn't answer it as I thought I would be there quicker than I could write. But things happened here so that I couldn't come without being mean and dirty and I never was when I could help it. So that I've promised to stay until Wed. noon. And then with the help of the lord I'll be with you.

I hope that you didn't make plans for Sunday which I disappointed. And if so rest assured that it was through no fault of mine that I was not there, as I'll explain when I see you.

I'm sorry to hear about your scraps with Gertie [Gertie & Ed McKenna with whom Mary boarded]. For anyone who knows you must say that you treated them right when they needed you. But that is the way of the world. The more you do for some people the sooner it is forgotten.

I've also heard news that jarred me. You see, it's like this. If there was one on earth that I thought I could depend my life upon, it was my brother Lou. But I got a few lines from mother saying that he had gone to the navy and had taken Bryan [another brother] with him. And not a word to me about it. After all his promises.

I felt so bad about getting the double cross from him that I got raving drunk and stayed that way for 3 days and even now I feel like crying when I think of it. But I'll see you Wed. night and we will talk it all out. Till then I remain

Your Friend J.T. McGuire

If anything prevents you seeing me Wed. night drop a postal to 240 Caledonia [the home of John's parents Hugh & Mary McGuire in Rochester] as I will go there first. J.T.M.

[Letter #4]

Columbus, O. 5/9 – 17 [Wednesday]

Dear Mary:

Just a line to say that at last I'm in the army. We sure had some trip and got here at 3:30 A.M. yesterday. [Brother} Jim and nearly all the bunch that came with us got through all right. So it's not at all lonesome. No one of our bunch has shown much signs of homesickness. Although some of us would give a lot to see our sweethearts. But of course we know that's impossible, so we are looking forward to the day of our first furlough. Whenever that will be. We don't know how long we will be left here but the chances are not for long. So that I can't tell you where to address and answer.

Tell John that I haven't found that white feather [sign of cowardice] yet but when I do, that I'll send it for him to wear.

Mary I'm sure glad to think that you came down to the station to see us off as it showed you care a little, but I'm glad you left when you did. For all the bunch were crying when they parted from their girls and I'm afraid I might have too. Indeed I was near enough to it as it was. And how Sandy would have roasted me if I had. But it's nothing one can help.

We got our uniforms this morning and you wouldn't believe how different we look. Jim sure makes a classy looking soldier. Tell Ed and all the bunch that I remember them and I will write again when I have the chance. Till then, Goodbye and God keep you.

Give my regards to all and keep my love for yourself as ever.

J.C. McGuire

[Letter #5]

Ft. Ethan Allen, VT 5/14 – 17 [Monday]

Dear Mary:

I've been wondering for a week now how the world is using my dear girl. But we have been moving around so much that I had no address to send you. As it is now it looks as if we will be here for 2 or 3 months at least so we can hear from each other more regular. I dropped a Postal [postcard] on the station platform at Rochester for you as we came through Friday morning at 2 A.M. in the hopes that someone would pick it up and mail it. The other fellows that had girls there did the same. But the chances are 1 to ten that you ever get it.

As far as we have went I think that I'm going to like the life. They are drilling the devil out of us just at present so as to get us into the regulars. The only thing that was hard was the examination at Columbus [Ohio – site of basic training camp]. They sure feed us all we can eat and the food is good. So there is nothing to kick about. Tell John that he should have come along as it's the best yet. One meets recruits from all over the country and they're all a bunch of nice young fellows. Not the kind one is apt to be mixed with once they start drafting.

No matter what kind of pastime you like you can find some of the bunch ready at any time in our leisure time. Also tell John if he has any more cigarettes than he can smoke that they are at a premium here. I'm sending you a picture I had taken the last night at Columbus but please don't let anyone see it, as it is rotten. And I'll have some better ones taken later.

I hope you will go up and see the old folks whenever you can. Give my regards to all the bunch and once in a while say a prayer and write a line for your Sincere Friend

John C. McGuire
4th recruit Co.
Ft. Ethan Allen VT

[Letter #6 to Mary M. Farrell, 15 Zimmer St., Rochester, N.Y.]

Fort Ethan Allen, VT 5/20 – 17 [Sunday]

Dear Maura:

Your cheering and most welcome letter arrived Friday, and to say I was rejoiced to get it would be only half expressing my feelings. For it's the first and only news that either Jim or myself have received from home so far. I'm very sorry that so many things combined to make you feel so bad about last week. But I hope and pray that God may bring things about so that you will sometime know so much happiness that will cause you to forget all the pain and heart-ache you are now going through. And I sincerely hope that I may be the one he chooses to secure that happiness for you. For Mary; you have won your way into my heart in such a way that I'd gladly die or make any other sacrifice on earth or hereafter that would in any way make more happiness for you. Believe me my dearest girl this is no hot air and I only ask for a way to prove it.

We were busy yesterday so I put off answering your letter till today as Sunday is called a day of rest here. Here is how much rest I've had today. The first bugle call or revillee sounded at 6:15 this morning. (1 hour later than week days.) We answered roll-call at 6:30, washed up and made our beds by 7:00, when we had breakfast. Then I took a bath and shaved and went to 9 o'clock Mass; got back at 10:15. Took all my dirty clothes and washed them and hung them out by 11:30. Then cleaned up to wait on table as it was my turn today. I finished and ate my own dinner at 12:45. Then got out into line to attend the funeral march of two [two] recruits who died in the hospital yesterday and who were being sent home. It is now 2:30 and we just got back from the station and we have nothing further to do except stand at retreat for about 10 minutes at 5:30. So you see it is some day of rest isn't it?

But even at that there is something about it that one can't help but like. And now that the draft bill has been signed, it's something to say that we came voluntarily. Not that it makes us any better than those that will be sent. But I pity the drafted men for what they will undoubtedly have to take from the old regulars. And you should hear what some of the regulars who were down on the border have to say about the National Guard. They call them boy scouts, tin soldiers and every other toy name they can think of. And the instructors say they would rather take any troop of raw farmers and make soldiers of them than the best of the guards men they have ever seen.

You say I look scart [scared] in that picture. Well, if you went through what I did for the 36 hours before that picture was taken you wouldn't look good either. We went through an examination at Buffalo the day we left Rochester. Then we all got about half drunk before leaving Buffalo. Then we traveled all night without any sleep and went through 3 more doctor's examinations at Columbus that day. So is it any wonder I was nervous and looked scared. They found things wrong with all of us that we knew nothing about. And some of the bunch that started that day were rejected and sent back.

As for your own pictures, I wear them and my rosary always over my heart. And always will as long as I'm in the Army whether that is 10 weeks or 10 years. For while there are lots of girls, and pretty girls at that, around here and most of the rookies are bugs over them, I've seen nothing that can compare with the looks and eyes of my dear friend Mary.

The best looking things here are the mountains. Where we are it's a great clearing in a valley of pines with the mountains entirely surrounding us and in any direction we can see the mountain peak covered with snow. It's sure H—for the boys from the south and many of them have caught cold and some of them have developed into pneumonia, that's what killed the two who died yesterday, poor devils. They

came from Missouri or Kentucky or somewhere down there, so they say, and they only died an hour apart.

We have all been more or less sick this week from vaccination and inoculation against small-pox and typhoid, but the Rochester bunch are all pretty well over it now. They are organizing a new regiment now and we were told yesterday that we were assigned to the new 18th Cavalry. So that means new horses, saddles, rifles, sabers, and everything. We are also to be all in one troop. That is, they will take the whole 75 men who came from Columbus with us and add 30 more to make up 105 which is the war strength of a troop. Then there are 20 troops to a regiment. We go into camp some time this week, but are to have our mail sent here, till further notice.

Tell John he only has till the 5th of June before they will be making him go [i.e. the draft begins]. There is a guy here named Hussy that is the dead image of Willie McK, only he is much bigger. Tell all the bunch that I'm thinking of them often including Margaret and Marie. And tell them I'll bring them some real German dolls if we go across. And I'm lucky enough to get back.

Well Mary; this is all the news I can think of now. So I'll quit for now and say Good-bye. Hoping to hear from you very soon and praying for your health and happiness both now and Forever. I remain Your True Friend

John C. McGuire

Say a prayer once in a while for your Johnnie.

The priest said this morning a soldier should never start any where without his pipe, his knife and his rosary. Some priest he is too.