When the United States entered the Great War in 1917, John Hezekiah ("Hezzie") Pat trick was working in Washington, D.C., attending George Washington University. On May 18, President Wilson signed the Selective Service Act, and Hezzie went to the War Department to volunteer for civilian support work, one of the first to do so. Ten days later on May 28, 1917, Hezzie sailed with the first detachment of American troops to France on the Baltic with General John Pershing to serve as a civilian clerk and "confidential secretary" to the Medical Corps of the Quartermaster Department. He was commissioned Second Lieutenant on March 30, 1918 and was assigned to the military aerial photography school, which was the first of its kind and evolved into the Army Intelligence School. He was serving at the front when the war ended.

More recent history, like that of World War I - which began just over a hundred years ago, can be explored in much greater depth than a lot of ancient history, because many documents, photographs, and personal histories still exist and are in excellent condition. In fact, many of us have family members that were part of major historical events. Hezzie, mentioned above, was raised on his family farm near Higbee, Missouri, and his family donated his letters and memorabilia to the University of Missouri. We are able to look at these family artifacts (seen here) to better understand how World War I affected everyday Americans right here at home in central Missouri.

Excerpt from a letter Hezzie wrote to his parents.

New York City
Saturday 11:00 p.m.
July 5, 1919

Dear Mother and Dad:

We arrived tonight, getting checked off the boat at 8:30. . . . I got away from Brest much quicker than I anticipated - arrived one day at 11:00 and sailed the next morning, the 28th. . . . but just as soon as I get my honorable discharge from the U.S. Army I will lose no time coming home. . . . it is great to be back. . . .
European Alliances and Battlefronts, 1914–1917