

# Private Fred O. Carr Tells of Levee Break

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**Hidalgo Soldiers Describes His Experiences When a Mississippi Levee Broke Near Valmeyer, Ill.**

Private First Class Fred O. Carr writes his mother Mrs. Emma Carr of Hidalgo from Scott field, Belleville, where he is in the United States Army Air Corps: "I guess you know by now that I didn't get to come home. I have seen a little excitement since I wrote you last. I didn't tell you why we were restricted, for I thought you would just worry. I was standing by ready to go on flood detail when I wrote. I was even dressed and ready. We didn't go though until in the night. They woke us up at 1:15 a. m. and we ate and then left.

"We were working on the levee close to Valmeyer, Illinois, which is a town about fifty miles south of Scott field. The water was running over the levee in a few places and we had to fill sandbags and make it higher. In some places the levee would break where a groundhog or mole had made holes in it and we would have to fix that. We had it under control in fine shape where we were working but the levee broke up above us. We filled a few more sandbags and made the levee higher by a farm home so it wouldn't be washed away. They told us the water wouldn't get down to us for an hour or an hour and a half.

## **Water Over Road**

"We worked about fifteen minutes and someone looked around the house to the road we were to go out on and boy, the water was running over the road at about ninety miles an hour. We grabbed our equipment and jumped in the truck and started up. There was a civilian in a 1935 model car ahead of us and he started down the middle of the road but the water washed his car right off the road. There were fifty of us soldiers and when we reached the spot where the civilian was, he yelled for us to come and help him push his car out.

"We started out with all of our equipment on and we soon found out that we had better make a chain with our hands so we wouldn't get washed down the river. Part of us got out to the car and when we got out there all we could do was hang on, and believe me, that wasn't easy. The water was running up to the tops of the fenders on the car by that time and we decided to get back on the same side we came from if we could.

## Made It Ashore

"We started back but the chain of arms broke about three fellows from me and we went on back to shore. Believe me, I was scared and everyone else was, including the lieutenant. I was soaked through and through. There were around twelve fellows left hanging on the car and right then I would have bet anything not one of them would get out. We got a rope from some place and tied one end to a tree and the other on the car and they came across on the rope. The water was up over the top of the radiator of the car by this time.

"One of the boys lost his grip on the car and started down stream. Another guy went after him and they both got out some way. Believe me, that guy had guts that turned loose on the car to bring that other fellow back. We finally all got back to dry ground, which I thought was impossible. We were blocked on all sides, and water coming up like the devil and everyone soaked through.

## Dried Our Clothes

"We were all very hungry, for it was noon and we hadn't had a bite to eat since 1:30 a. m. We went up to the farm house and took off our clothes and tried to dry them. The lieutenant called for help but the line was washed out. We were on the highest point of ground around and we decided to stay until help come.

"The lieutenant sent two sergeants to look for a different way out and they found one about two miles up the levee where we could get out if we hurried. The water was waist deep but no current. We walked up the levee and waded across this place. There wasn't any current on top but there was plenty underneath so it was a little hard to keep your footing, but really simple after what we had just gone through.

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"We had to walk quite a ways and then some farmers gave us a ride in their pick-up trucks. Then we walked down the railroad for some distance, where we were met by a big truck which took us back to town. We got some good sandwiches and coffee. We felt fine after the food.

"My watch is full of water and my billfold soaked but I didn't lose any equipment. I couldn't get out of it. Some of the boys lost a lot of their equipment. One boy had a \$60.00 watch washed off his arm. We sure were all scared but only one or two became panicky.

## **Feels Fine**

"I'm feeling fine today and my watch has even started running again. My pictures in my billfold are sure a mess but we sure were lucky. We have a lot of fun talking about it now but none of us thought it was very funny at the time. The last I saw of that car the top was just above the water.

"I guess I'd better quit writing about the flood, but there are a lot of things that are funny that happened, but I will save those until I am home. They seem funny now but they weren't at the time. I always wanted to see the Mississippi, but I had no desire to go swimming in it, and I have less now.

"I always thought that people would be excited if they were in a flood or knew the water was going to be up in their homes in a few hours, but those people went around like nothing was going to happen and that they didn't care if it did. The next time anyone ever tells me a levee has broken I'm heading for some higher ground no matter what anyone says and I know every one of the fifty in my truck will too.

## **Slept Fourteen Hours**

"I didn't know it was possible but I got almost fourteen hours sleep last night. I went to bed at 7:00 and didn't get up until 9:30 this morning. The first time that's happened to me since I've been in the Army. Some of the boys got some pictures of the flood. If they are good, I will get some and show you folks.

"It is time for dinner, so I must close. I guess we start back to school tomorrow as today is out day off. School will seem pretty nice now."

His address is Private First Class Fred O. Carr, 368 T. S. S., Barracks 231, Scott Field, Illinois.