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PRIVATE EDWARD ALVA TRUEBLOOD

*Observations of an American Soldier During
His Service With the A. E. F. in France*

**In the
Flash Ranging
Service**

by

Private Edward Alva Trueblood





"I pledge allegiance to my Flag and to
the Republic for which it stands—
one nation, indivisible, with liberty
and justice for all."

This book is a record of the personal observations of a private soldier in the Flash Ranging Service of the American Expeditionary Forces in France. It not only relates his experiences while in France, but also tells of going over and returning. In brief, it is a soldier's story from the time he left America to help crush the autocracy of Germany, until he returned again after fighting was over.

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[1]

In the Flash Ranging Service

By Private Edward Alva Trueblood

Chapter I.

ToC

Going Over.

When the sun arose on the 22nd of June, 1918, three great transports were lying out in the stream of New York harbor. They were filled with American soldiers for duties overseas. They were well camouflaged and well convoyed. The previous afternoon they had pulled away from a Jersey City pier, where they had taken on their human cargoes, and they were undoubtedly under sealed orders. They had slipped away quietly from the piers without attracting undue attention, and while they moved to the location where they anchored for the night, not a soldier's uniform could have been detected from shore even after the most scrutinizing search with the best binoculars obtainable. The departure was made without a word of warning and not a fond good-bye. It was accomplished with a methodical silence that called for admiration. It is the way Uncle Sam does things during war times.

Just before 9 o'clock on that beautiful June morning, simultaneously but without communicating with each other, each of those transports began to weigh anchor, and except for the click, click, click of the machinery all was silent. Precisely at 9:05, without the blast of a whistle, the sound of a gong, or the hoisting of a signal flag on the mast, but like so many automatic machines, these vessels turned their prows to the sea and began their long voyage.

Among those who sailed on one of the vessels of this transport fleet were the members of the Twenty-ninth Engineers, A. E. F., of which I was a member, being attached to Company C. Our departure was an occasion never to be forgotten.

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As we glided out of the great harbor and saw first the Statue of Liberty, then all trace of our native land disappear from sight, and we realized that we were on our way to fight the most savage, inhuman and despicable foe that has ever drawn a lance, a feeling of solemn thoughtfulness came over most of the boys. Many of them were so affected, as they knew a certain percentage of us must inevitably fall in battle, that they went below to spend a few hours by themselves in serious thought. I am not ashamed to say that I was one of those who sought solace for my feelings in thoughtful solitude.

The vessel upon which we sailed was an Italian transport, by name, the "King of Italy." It was accompanied by a French and a former German liner and was convoyed by a destroyer and a cruiser. On the second day out we picked up four more transports, making seven in all in our fleet.

There were 1,500 American soldiers on our transport and approximately the same on four of the other transports. Two of them, however, carried more than 3,500 men, making a total of about 15,000 men on that one fleet bound for duty overseas. Of the 1,500 men on the King of Italy, 500 were white and 1,000 colored troops. No trouble was caused by this mixture of races because of good management. The white and colored boys were kept on different parts of the boat and all guard duty was in the hands of the white troops.

For the first few hours after sailing, thoughts of home lingered in the minds of most of the boys, but these were hastily banished when we had our first life drill. This took place at 2 o'clock on our first day out. The drill was a thorough one, and it soon became apparent to most of the boys that even if we should be torpedoed by a submarine while going across, our troops would have no difficulty in getting away from the boat before it took its final plunge toward the bottom of the sea. In the life drill, every man had his place. He was assigned to a certain boat and could take no other. The lower decks were emptied first, and then those above, one at a time. I was bunked on the fifth deck, hence, as the liner had six decks, would have been among the last to leave the ship, in case of disaster.

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The object of the life drill, of course, was to make it possible to empty the boat of troops quickly and in military order in the event that the boat became a submarine victim. Every man was instructed at the sound of the alarm to go to his bunk and stand there until given further orders. In the meantime, he was to put on his life belt. The boys marched out to the life boats only when they received orders from their superiors to do so. After a few drills, we mastered the manoeuver and it would have been possible for us to have emptied that boat of 1,500 soldiers in twelve minutes, if such action had been necessary.

We had life drills two or three times a day all the way across. The signal for the drill was four siren blasts, and when we heard those blasts, there was a lively time on deck for a few minutes, until the ship, in theory, had been abandoned.

American people, who believe in giving their soldiers the right kind of treatment, and particularly wholesome food, would have been righteously indignant, if they could have known how poorly we were fed while on that transport. Those at home were buying Liberty Bonds and paying heavy war taxes so that the boys in the fighting forces would be well fed and clothed, and yet, it is hard to imagine how men could have been treated worse, so far as food is concerned than were the men of this boat. I am going to be just as frank as I know how in describing food conditions with the hope that by calling public attention to this petty graft, such practices will be stopped, so far as American fighting men are concerned. To any who have weak stomachs, I suggest that they skip over the next two or three pages, as the details may nauseate them.

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The kitchens and mess rooms of the transport were on the top deck. Meal tickets were issued to the men, and when they went to mess, the tickets were punched. This is the way the Government kept track of the number of meals served, as these tickets were collected when we left the boat. The white men were fed first, and the colored troopers afterwards. This was done so as to keep free of any possibility of racial trouble, and apparently it worked well.

After the second day out, our "chow," which is the soldier's name for food of all kinds, was vile. It consisted largely of spoiled beef and such foods as spoiled rabbits. When I say spoiled, I mean just what the word implies. These rabbits were positively in a state of decay. They had been in cold storage for a long time, evidently a very long time. They had been carried in the ice boxes without being drawn, and when exposed to the air the odor of decay was so strong that they were positively nauseating. I saw strong men turn exceedingly sick just from the stench, and I do not believe it is an exaggeration to say that there was more upset stomachs on that trip from the decaying rabbits that were given us to eat than from the action of the sea.

The beef that we were given consisted of only the poorest and toughest parts. The good cuts went to the mess for the army officers and for the officers and crew of the ship. The potatoes that we were fed were the poorest that I have ever seen. They were served about half cooked, and were small, wet, soggy and unpalatable. It was seldom that a potato fit to eat was given to the men. We received rice several times, but it was only about half cooked. During one meal we were given bologne sausage, and after some of the boys had eaten their allotment, the discovery was made that the sausage was full of maggots. The soup was like water with neither flavor nor body. The bread served was Italian-French bread made with sour dough, and not at all palatable to an American, who has been accustomed to sweet and wholesome bread. The coffee was of the poorest quality—probably mostly chickory—and we were given neither milk nor sugar for it. The result was that most of the boys did not touch their coffee at all. The only seasoning given our food was an insufficiency of salt. Everything served was tasteless, unpalatable and unwholesome.

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That there was better food on the boat, we knew, for we could see it going to the officers' tables. They were served chicken two or three times a week—the men never. Officers were given fresh fruit at every meal—the men not at all. Officers were given palatable, sweet bread; the men only when they would pay for it out of their own pockets and then at a big price.

It is my opinion that the owners of the boat on which I sailed made an enormous profit off those meals served to the soldiers. Certainly the Government would not have given the soldiers such unfit food. The Government is to blame to this extent, however, in not seeing that the ship owners lived up to their contract to feed the men properly. There was a man on board who was supposed to see that the men were given wholesome and nourishing food, but he failed absolutely to perform his duty. Whether he was in the company's pay or simply negligent, I cannot say, for I do not know. But it is a fact that he did not perform his duty and 1,500 men were fed spoiled and unwholesome food as a result. Men who indulge in "graft" of this kind are no better than traitors,

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and should be treated as such by the Government.

As a part of the uneatable diet we were given, numerous complaints were made. We were not long in being told that we could purchase something in the way of wholesome food for ourselves, if we had the money. This was done on the sly. We could purchase a palatable steak for \$1.50 or \$2, or we could get chops for about the same price. A chicken would cost about \$4. All the boys who had money were forced to buy food this way or go hungry. Many of the boys ate only enough to keep them alive. Often two would go in together and buy a steak or a chicken, each putting up half of the money. Even then, we could not get the food we wanted, as only a limited quantity could be "sneaked" out.

We could buy sweet bread in the canteen on the boat for 25 cents a loaf, and a small loaf at that. That was the only way we could get it. Sweet rolls, the kind that sell four for a nickle at home, cost two for a nickle. Oranges, apples, bananas and other kinds of fruit cost 25 cents each. Unable to eat the food in the mess room, most of the boys had to pay the exorbitant prices asked at the canteen or go hungry.

We had no sugar at all. The Government must have provided a sugar ration for us, so my conclusion is that it was stolen by someone in connection with the boat management and used in some form of graft. Because it was necessary for them to buy so much of their food, all the boys who had money with which they expected to buy things when they landed on the other side, were without a penny when the boat docked.

Every afternoon between 2 and 3 o'clock, the Y. M. C. A. workers who were on the transport came on deck and held song services. Many familiar hymns were sung. These meetings were very popular at first, but gradually the fascination for them wore off, and toward the latter part of the voyage they were but lightly attended. [7]

The "Y" workers did promote one form of entertainment, however, that the boys thoroughly enjoyed. This was boxing. Every afternoon several bouts would be held. Nearly every company had a fighter and he was matched with the best man of some other company. Lively bouts of about three or four rounds were fought. The colored soldiers took to this sport keenly and they furnished some good contests among themselves. White men, however, were not permitted to box the colored soldiers, as such a bout might have led to a racial difference. Members of the ship's crew also wanted to partake in the sport and they furnished several bouts. The sailors, however, were somewhat awkward at first, but they were game and they afforded us many a good laugh. Those who had charge of the boxing never let a bout go to a knockout. When one man was apparently getting the worst of it or was clearly outboxed, the bout would be stopped.

Very strict rules were issued on the boat with regard to lights at night. Every porthole was closed, and every precaution taken so that not a gleam of light could be seen. The men were warned that anyone who attempted to make a light would be shot on the spot. The fleet moved along in the darkness at full speed ahead. That it did not meet with accident was due to excellent management on the part of the Government.

All the boats in our fleet were camouflaged. The King of Italy had great irregular streaks of black and white painted across it. One of the boats in our fleet had a really remarkable picture of a sinking ship painted on its side. Another had two ships painted on its side and was camouflaged to look like two vessels instead of one. While the camouflaged ships appeared strange at first, we soon were used to the unusual appearance, and thought nothing of them. A camouflaged vessel is visible to the naked eye, almost as plain as one that has not been daubed with paint, but it is through the mirrors of a periscope that the camouflage is effective. In reflecting the picture on the horizon, the mirrors lose some of the rays of light, so officers explained to me, hence the eyes of the periscope are unable to detect the camouflage. [8]

Our voyage passed pleasantly with smooth seas until the eleventh day, when the water was a little choppy, and then for the first time some of the boys were a little sea sick.

It was my fortune to see our first and only brush with a submarine. It happened about 4 o'clock in the morning on the twelfth day out. The sea was choppy and the night very dark and cold. I was on guard duty on the sixth deck of our vessel, and I noticed unusual activity on the part of the destroyers that were convoying our fleet. Our transport stopped dead still. In a moment four shots were fired from the destroyer. I could see the fire from the gun plainly. It was an exciting moment and the first real guns of war that I had ever heard. Depth bombs were also dropped, then all was still again. All this happened without disturbing the men asleep on our boat, and in the morning they were told that the transport had been attacked by submarines. It was the belief that the destroyer had sunk one of the U-boats.

We were given orders on the twelfth day to sleep in our clothes with our life belts on during the rest of the trip. This was issued so that there would be no delay in getting off the boat if we were hit by a torpedo. That night, being unused to sleeping with clothes on, was a restless one for most of us. The following night, however, notwithstanding the fact that we were fully dressed, we slept well. [9]

We were also joined on that day by a flotilla of destroyers. The sight of these boats was hailed with joy, for we knew we were nearing land. We had not been informed, however, in what country nor at what port we would land, but we had hoped that it would be France, and we soon learned that our destination was France.

The torpedo boat flotilla that accompanied us during the last two days was made up mostly of American and British destroyers, though there were two French boats among them. They made a lively scene, and surely gave us great protection. If a speck would appear on the horizon, two

boats would be off to investigate it, and would return later to join the fleet. We were also accompanied on the last day of the voyage by two airplanes as a further protection against submarines.

We sighted land on the thirteenth day, and it was a welcome view. Everybody was happy and eager to disembark. It was quite a contrast from the feeling that existed just after we left New York harbor. We were a merry crowd as we entered the harbor of Brest and we were glad to see a large city again. We disembarked at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Before leaving the boat, we were given "leaving rations," which consisted of a loaf of sour bread, a can of bully beef and a small piece of cheese. This was given to us because we had a long march ahead and our kitchens would not be in place for several hours. We were taken off the transport on barges built especially for that purpose. We were then marched to the Napoleon Barracks, built by the Emperor Napoleon, eight miles from Brest, and were glad to put our feet on land again, even though the march was a long one after a thirteen day sea voyage. We had only a passing glimpse of Brest, but did not mind that as we knew we would have opportunity to visit the city later.

[10]

CHAPTER II.

ToC

Our First Glimpse of France

At Brest, the American soldiers got their first idea of the magnitude of the work that the American Government was doing in the prosecution of the war. Prior to our arrival there we had heard a great deal about the construction work in French ports that the Americans had undertaken, but our ideas of just what this work was, were more or less vague. At Brest we saw just what it was. We saw miles of concrete piers that had been built in record-breaking time with American skill, American speed and American thoroughness. This work was a revelation to all France, and the magnitude of the task, together with the remarkably short time in which it was completed, stamp it as one of the wonders of the war and as a lasting tribute to American ingenuity and efficiency. These piers and warehouses of American construction played a great part in ending the war, for they enabled the American Government not only to land millions of troops in France, but to provide adequate food, ammunition, guns and other necessary supplies for these men. Nothing like it had ever been done before in the history of the world.

Soon after we left the boat at Brest, the men were lined up on the pier and given a sensible and appreciated address by the Commanding Officer. He told us that now more than ever before, since we were upon foreign soil, orders were to be obeyed to the letter. We were told to be careful in all that we did because by our actions the French people would judge the American nation. He advised us to do everything commanded of us by our officers with snap and thoroughness, so as to show the French people that we were not raw recruits; that we were real soldiers; that we could do as well at any task, if not better, than the soldiers of Europe. The boys, to a man, lived up to those instructions, and it was not long before the world knew that the American soldier was the equal of any on earth.

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After this interesting advice was received we swung into squad right and our first march on French territory began. We first marched more than a mile through the railroad yards in Brest. These were all of American construction. We saw miles of warehouses, filled with various kinds of material of war and great quantities of food, not only for the American soldiers, but for the civilians of France as well. These warehouses were of wooden construction, and so different in design and material from other buildings in Brest that we recognized at once that they were built by Yankees. For this reason, we greeted them as friends; it was like looking upon a familiar scene.

Most everything else, however, that met our eyes had a decidedly foreign look. The railroad trains in the yards were French, and entirely different from those of this country. The freight cars have a diminutive look. They are only about half the size of American cars and they rest upon single trucks. The locomotives are much smaller than ours and have brass boilers. We did not see anything of the familiar dark red American box car and the giant American locomotives until we got into the interior of France.

We passed many peasant women and children while we were marching through the railroad yards. Some of them were offering cakes and nuts for sale, others were begging white bread from us. It was here that we first heard those two French words that became so familiar to us before we left France, "Donnez moi." It was "donnez moi" this and "donnez moi" that, especially from the children who begged cigarettes, pennies, and anything else that the American boys might have to give away.

[12]

Brest is built on hills, some of which rise abruptly and give a picturesque look to the old city. As we marched through the residence part of the city, the women from the windows gave us a

hearty welcome, waving flags and calling "Vive les Amerique." Our march took us over a winding roadway through the district where the poorer classes lived and we did not get a view of the more attractive parts of the city on our arrival. The street we marched along was paved with broken rock and was in excellent condition; it was crossed several times by overhead railroad tracks built on massive arches of masonry.

Our first impressions are rather difficult to describe because everything had such different appearance from familiar things in America. One noticeable feature was the character of the construction. The buildings are of stone or some other such inflammable material, with roofs of slate or tile. There are no frame buildings, except those that have been constructed by Americans since April, 1917.

The dress and the habits of the people differ materially from those of America. Most of the lower classes wear sabots, or wooden shoes. Some wear sabots with leather tops. But few, if any, all leather shoes are in use among the lower classes. While all shades and colors of clothes were worn by children, we noticed that the women were nearly all dressed in black. This, we believed to be because they had lost relatives in the war, and we later found that our conclusion was the correct one. Among the poorer classes the men wear large loosely fitting trousers and tight jackets. They wear a peculiar hat, with a tightly fitting crown, a broad round brim, and two streamers of black ribbon about eighteen inches long hanging down in back. The middle classes dress more like Americans, though not with as well made clothes as one is accustomed to see in this country. [13]

After marching about five miles, we were given a rest in an open field in the outskirts of Brest. Here we were again addressed by an officer and cautioned to be careful about coming in contact with the French people, and particularly with the women and children of the lower classes. We were informed that the lower classes of women and the peasant children are nearly all syphilitic, especially in seaport towns. This sent a shudder through us, for we had already been fondling some of the French children, before we realized the necessity for caution. The warning was heeded and thereafter the boys kept the peasants at a distance.

As we resumed our march, we began to get into a cultivated district. The rolling land along the roadway was cut up into small farms ranging in size from a half acre to about two and a half acres. The boundary lines of these farms were hedges; there were no fences, such as we have in America. The land was planted to truck gardens, berries, fruit trees, etc., and at the time that we saw them, they were in good condition and apparently quite productive.

It was about 6 o'clock in the evening and after a long and hard march that we arrived at the Napoleon Barracks, where we were to have a few days' rest before going into the interior. These barracks are quite extensive. They are built of stone and are surrounded by a stone wall. The wall is about three feet thick and twenty feet high, and it would be a difficult matter for anyone to scale it. To keep soldiers from trying to get out, broken glass is cemented into it for the entire length on top. The purpose of this was to make it so dangerous that no soldier would attempt to climb it. There are two arched gateways leading to the interior. These archways are fitted with heavy gates, which were originally designed as defense gates in case of attack. The main buildings within the enclosure are of two stories and are built of stone. We were not long in being assigned to the bunks that we were to occupy during our stay. These were two decked affairs with a mattress of slats about two inches apart to sleep on. They were about as uncomfortable as anyone can imagine and most of the boys preferred to sleep on the floor. These barracks had been occupied by many American boys who had gone before us. We saw thousands of American names written on the walls, and occasionally we would run across one that we knew. And, like the other, we too wrote our names, for the boys who followed to read and comment upon. [14]

Our meal for the first night at the barracks consisted of the rations we had been given upon leaving the ship—bully beef, sour bread and cheese. Our cooks got their fires started and gave us some coffee, which stimulated us after our long and tiresome march.

After eating, we were permitted to write to our folks at home, and all of us spent the evening in correspondence. We were not permitted to write while on board ship, so most of us had several letters to send. I wrote until 11 o'clock that night. I was surprised to find that it was not yet dark. The long and appreciated twilight is due to the fact that Brest is a great distance farther north than Sacramento, and this was in the middle of summer, when the evenings are longest.

Not all of the buildings within the walls at the barracks are of ancient construction. Several were recently built, such as a hospital, a bath house for the accommodation of our men, the Y. M. C. A. hut, etc. At this particular place the "Y" hut was appreciated by us because it afforded us amusement, we could buy fruit, cakes, tobacco and other articles there, and we could attend to our correspondence there. We were assembled there on one occasion to hear two addresses on the ways and habits of the French people, which were to benefit us. We also exchanged our American money at the hut for French money. For a dollar we received five francs and seventy centimes, and it was amusing to see the boys studying over the French money system, as it was difficult to understand at first. Some of the boys, not knowing the value of the French franc, paid enormous prices for fruits, candies, etc., to French women and girls, who peddled these articles. [15]

While at the Napoleon Barracks we saw the first American wounded. They were soldiers who had participated in the defense against the German drive which began in March, 1918. It was from them that we first learned the real horrors of war. Some had only one arm; others had lost a leg; still others were suffering from shell shock. Those who were suffering from shell shock were the most pitiful, as the least unusual noise startled them.

I had the good fortune to be placed on a motor truck detail during three days of our brief stay at Brest. This gave me an opportunity of seeing most of the city. It has about 120,000 inhabitants, is one of the chief ports of France and has a harbor that is protected by nature as well as by strong fortifications. Lying as it does, among the hills, there is much natural beauty in the city and its surroundings. The streets are about as wide as those of the average American city, although there are a number of very narrow streets that cut into the main thoroughfares at angles and these reminded me somewhat of the narrow streets of Boston. The city is kept clean and there are numerous parks and public squares. The latter are frequented mostly by women and children, though it is not uncommon to see French soldiers, home from the front on leave, lounging in them. The warm blooded French people have ideas that differ widely from those of Americans in many respects, and it is nothing unusual to see a French couple making love in broad daylight with persons passing by on all sides, in one of these public parks. Occasionally one would see an American soldier sitting with a French Mademoiselle. French troops were often drilling in these squares—not troops that had participated in the war, but companies of younger men who were being trained for war. It was interesting to watch them and to contrast their manoeuvres with ours.

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There are no skyscrapers in Brest, that is to say, there are no tall office buildings there, although the city is an important business point. The only tall structures are the churches and an old castle, dating from the thirteenth century. The business buildings are all of two or three stories. The stores are not as up to date as the retail establishments in America, and the methods of doing business are entirely different from ours. Goods are not on display in the open as they are in American stores, but are kept in show cases. If you are interested in a certain piece of goods, the clerk takes it out of the show case and exhibits it to you. If you do not buy it, the article is placed right back in the show case. The clerks are mostly girls. They are plainly dressed but always neat. Most of them wear black. They are by no means as well dressed as American girls who work in stores. The French store employes are very poorly paid, the average wage for a clerk being two and a half francs, or about 50 cents in American money a day.

During the war, Brest was very much of a cosmopolitan city. On the streets most any day could be seen the uniforms of the soldiers and sailors of all the Allied nations—French, British, Italian, Portuguese, American and others. The uniforms of the different nations are of different hues and they gave a tinge of color to the crowds on the streets. They ranged from spotless white to faded blues. The uniforms of the Italian soldiers, in my opinion, were the most attractive. They were a pretty gray, well made and attractive in design. The uniform of the American soldier, while not the prettiest, is the most serviceable. For war use it is no doubt the best. The British wear uniforms very much like ours, although a little different in shade and design. They are serviceable and neat but not attractive. The coat has a small lapel and large brass buttons that are always well shined. The home guards of the French army wore flashy coats and trousers. The trousers were either blue with a broad red stripe or red with a blue stripe.

[17]

I regret that our brief stay in Brest did not give me a better opportunity to see the mediaeval churches and castles in the vicinity. But war is serious business with no time for sightseeing and on the third night after our arrival, we received our orders to march at 4 o'clock the following morning. It was a restless night for we knew that every day from now on would take us nearer to the front and to the fight. At 3:30 o'clock on the morning of our departure we were all up and dressed and were packing our belongings. We came to company front promptly at 4 o'clock, just as the dawn was breaking; in a very few minutes we were marching out of the historic Napoleon Barracks never to see them again. The morning was cool and crisp; it was conducive to lively marching and we stepped along at a fast clip, passing three companies of infantry on the way to Brest. The march was an eight mile "hike" and we made it without a stop until we reached the railroad yards at Brest. We were then assigned to compartments in French railroad coaches. Most of them were second and third class coaches, although there were a few first class cars for the officers. There were five compartments to a car and eight men were assigned to each compartment; as we also had to make room for our luggage, we were crowded and uncomfortable. However, we made the best of the unpleasant conditions, and patiently awaited the starting of the train, which was to take us through a country new and strange to us, and nearer to the war zone.

[18]

CHAPTER III.

ToC

From Brest to Langres

Before our train pulled out of Brest we were ordered out of our crowded compartments in the French railroad coaches for the purpose of bringing in traveling rations. These consisted of canned bully beef, canned jam, canned beans and bread. The bread that was given to us here was

made into enormous loaves—the largest that any of us had ever seen. The loaves were sixteen or eighteen inches wide, from two and a half to three feet long and eight or nine inches high. They were American-made and were white and wholesome. The outside crust was hard but palatable and the inside was soft and flaky like home-made bread. We afterwards learned that these loaves had been baked weeks in advance and that they were kept fresh and palatable by the use of a chemical. Each compartment of eight men was given three of these large loaves which, together with a number of cans of beans, bully beef and jam, were to keep us supplied with food until we reached Langres, in eastern France, which was our destination. We had previously learned—on our trip overseas—to conserve food, and none of this supply was wasted. We stored it away in our cramped quarters and saw that it got proper care.

As we sat in the train waiting for it to start, we looked out upon the bay of Brest and saw numerous tugs busy along the waterfront. They were all engaged in war work of some kind. We also saw more American troops being landed at the wharf, just as we were landed a few days previous, and we knew their thoughts and feelings. In the air there were several airplanes and dirigible balloons giving needed protection to the ships that were entering the harbor. [19]

While we were still in the yards of Brest, we also saw for the first time in France, numerous Chinese coolies, who were doing with their labor their part toward winning the war. They worked on the railroad tracks in large gangs. To the Eastern boys who were not acquainted with this class of Chinese laborers, they were quite a curiosity, but to the Western boys, the sight was nothing unusual. The coolies, however, were not dressed in the customary Chinese clothes, as in California, but were in a garb more like that which American laborers wear. They had on overalls, loose blouses or jumpers, heavy leather shoes and straw hats.

We pulled out of Brest about 10 o'clock in the morning. The train was made up of about twenty-five or thirty of those small and uncomfortable French coaches, and it moved very slowly. To one used to the fast first-class American trains, this French train seemed exceedingly slow, unaccommodating and tiresome. We first climbed gradually up the hills, overlooking the bay, and were furnished with a wonderful view. We could see far out to sea, and were in part compensated for the lack of comforts to which an American is accustomed when traveling, by the beauty of the scenery, and the many strange and interesting sights that were constantly meeting our eyes.

Soon after we left the ocean we came to a fertile farming section, in which crops of various kinds, such as grains, fruits, garden truck, etc., were grown. We had known that the farms in European countries are small, especially those of France, as compared with farms in America, but it was necessary for us to see the actual size of these small farms to realize how diminutive they are. As in the vicinity of Brest, mentioned in a previous chapter, the cultivated areas ranged in size from a half acre to two and a half acres. Rarely we would see a place as large as five acres, but that was the exception. No fences separated these farms, but the boundaries were marked by hedges and occasionally a low stone wall. In these small fields cultivation is not practiced as in this country, but the land is tilled in narrow strips. The numerous different textures of the soil, accounted for the large number of strips. Each strip was planted to a crop to which it was best suited. [20]

The highways through this farming section are kept in excellent condition. They are built of rock and give the impression from the train window that a motor trip through France would be a delight. Rows of trees are planted along all the highways, the poplar tree predominating, but other trees being used frequently as well. The by-roads are of dirt but appear to be kept in good condition. They also have trees planted along them; this seems to be a characteristic of France, and readers will recall that in all war pictures where these roads have been shown, the rows of trees are always there. This is an excellent feature and one that California with its rapidly increasing mileage of concrete roads, might well follow.

Very few automobiles were seen on these highways, except those engaged in war transportation. Of course at the time that I made my observations, the country was engaged in war, and in peace times no doubt more automobiles belonging to civilians are in use. It is a fact, however, there are comparatively few automobiles among the civil population of France. Only the very rich own them. The masses of the people do not possess them, as in America. The civil population either walk along these highways or travel in horse-drawn carts and wagons. The carts are different from any that we see in America. Frequently they are heavily constructed with wheels of from six to eight feet in diameter. They are fitted with brakes, which are used on the grades. They have a long body, that is, long for a cart, and this is laden with the varied products of the small farms which are in this way taken to market. Most frequently these carts are drawn by one horse, though it is not unusual to see two or three horses hitched to one when the load is heavy. When more than one horse is used, the animals are not hitched abreast, but tandem. The wheel horse is hitched between two long heavy shafts and his duty seems to be largely that of steering the unwieldy conveyance, while the front horse or horses do most of the pulling. The harness is heavy and the rear horse is protected from sores that might be caused by rubbing, by a heavy and well padded saddle and a heavy girth. It was a common sight to see a woman driving one of these carts and guiding the wheel horse and handling the brakes, while boys were either driving or leading the leaders. These strange and cumbersome rigs, so different from any that we had ever seen before, interested and amused us. [21]

The crops in the section through which we passed on our first day out of Brest appeared to be good. They gave me, a Californian with considerable farming experience, the impression that agriculture has been very carefully studied by the French. Occasionally we would see small tracts lying fallow, apparently to give the land a needed rest, while other tracts were being cultivated. On some of the small farms it was haying season. We were surprised as we noted the methods of

the French farmer in this particular branch of husbandry. The hay was cut mostly by women and children with scythes. An American mower probably had never been seen there. It seemed like a tremendous waste of human energy to see these women and children doing such hard manual labor in the field, when a modern mower would cut the entire field in a very short time. It seems to me there should be a field for the sale of American mowers and other modern American farm machinery in the rural districts of France. While the farms are so small that the individual farmer could not, perhaps, afford to buy a mower, still, several farmers could go in together and buy one, or the community as a whole could buy one, for the common use of all who needed it. Here is something that the French and American Governments might get together on, for surely the French want to conserve the energy of their women and children who now do this hard work, and the Americans want a wider market for their modern farm equipment. It must be said, however, that the women of the French peasantry who were doing this hard work, appeared strong and healthful, and were enured to this difficult labor, no doubt, through many generations of this hard farm life.

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We noticed as we got away from the coast, that there was a change in the style of dress of the peasants. We no longer saw the round hats with the ribbon streamers hanging down behind, so familiar in the rural districts around Brest. The dress of the peasants, farther in the interior, was more like that of the laboring classes of America. The men and women both wore serviceable clothes of dark material, but few of them wore anything on their heads. Sabots were worn instead of leather shoes. The women wore a sort of an Arctic sock over the stockings; the men frequently wore no socks at all. Occasionally the sabots would be several sizes too large for the wearer, but were made to fit by stuffing straw in them. This must have been rather uncomfortable, but the French peasantry seemed not to mind it at all.

While the horse is the principal draft animal in France, oxen are also used by some farmers. Most Western boys have seen teams of oxen, as they are still in use in some of the mountain districts of California, or at least they were still in use up to a few years ago; but to the Eastern boys an ox team was a new and interesting sight, and there was much comment upon it.

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The first large city at which we stopped after leaving Brest was Nantes. This is a popular and ancient city, famous for the edict of Nantes, and more famous still, perhaps, because of the revocation of that edict by Louis XIV, which led to disastrous religious wars. Nantes is also famous as the birthplace of Jules Verne, whose "Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea," became an actuality during the world war. It is a city of about 150,000 and is an important industrial center, having extensive shipyards, factories, wharves, etc. It is on the right bank of the Loire River, about thirty-five miles from its mouth and is one of the chief ports of entry of France.

Nantes has a very interesting history and it contains many ancient and famous edifices. It was not our privilege, however, to see any more of the city than the views afforded from the train, for we stopped here but a short time. It was there that we got our first taste of French coffee, which is very different from that made and served in America. It was furnished to us by the French Government. At first it was distasteful to us, but after drinking it a few times we became used to it and later on we really liked it.

We were now in the rich valley of the Loire, one of the most productive and one of the most famous in France. It is not nearly so large as the Sacramento Valley, in California, nor as fertile, yet its fame extends around the world. It is drained by the Loire River, which is the longest river in France, being more than 600 miles in length, and being navigable for ships as far as Nantes and for river boats for more than five hundred miles of its length.

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In the valley of the Loire we began to see the beautiful vineyards of France. In this district the farms as a rule were a little larger than those we saw on our way from Brest to Nantes, and consequently the hedges were less numerous. It was an exceedingly picturesque scene that met our eyes as we rolled along in the slow train. One noticeable fact was that each little vineyard was of a different shade of green from that of its nearest neighbors, due perhaps, to a different variety of plant, or to a variation of soil. There seemed to be no two of just the same shade. It was also in the Valley of the Loire that we saw considerable fruit production. Orchards were more numerous here than on the coast. They were planted to most of the deciduous trees with which we of California are familiar, although prunes seemed to predominate.

While we were traveling through this valley we were greeted with some familiar sights and sounds. These were the American box car and locomotive and the sound of the whistle of a U. S. A. train. We greeted the American rolling stock as companions, and were truly glad to see them. We could easily distinguish between the sound of the whistle of an American locomotive and that of a French engine, the American whistle being deep and the French shrill. It may seem strange to think that I comment upon such a small matter as a locomotive whistle, but when one is in a foreign land, amid foreign scenes and sounds, a familiar sound is good to hear, even though it is as unmusical as a deep blast of an American-made locomotive.

Our next stop at a place of importance was at Tours—historic Tours. This is a city of more than 100,000 inhabitants and is one of the most interesting cities in France.

I spent several weeks here in a hospital after being gassed on the Metz front and I will speak in more detail of this city in a later chapter.

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At Tours we were given more freedom than at any previous stop, and here our officers bought chocolates, tobacco and fruit and distributed them among the men. These dainties were the first we had since leaving Brest and were surely appreciated.

After leaving Tours we continued to wind through the Valley of the Loire along the Loire River, and I must say that the vineyards and orchards between Tours and Orleans, our next stop, were the prettiest that I saw in all of France. In this particular part of the valley the trees and vines are exceedingly prolific, as compared with trees and vines in other parts of France. They are not, however, as prolific as those of California. The trees do not attain as large a growth as those of this State and the vines are less vigorous. The fruit is neither as large nor does it have the quality of ours. The 1918 fruit crop was a large one, as measured by French standards, but yield per acre, I am sure, would be small as compared with the yield per acre of a first class Sacramento river orchard. The difference of the quality and the yield as compared with our fruits, is undoubtedly due to the fact that for centuries the lands of the Loire have been cultivated, while our lands are new and contain all their natural richness. The vineyards are planted differently from ours. The vines are four feet apart one way and eight feet apart another, while ours are usually planted eight or ten feet apart each way. Having been reared on a California vineyard, I was naturally very much interested in the vineyards of France, and I examined those that I had the opportunity of visiting very carefully. I inspected some of the grapes that were pronounced first class by French vineyardists, and found them to be very inferior to California grapes. The berries were smaller and they contained less juice.

The farther we traveled into the interior of France, the more interested the people became in us. In other words, the nearer we came to the scene of action, the greater was the enthusiasm of the French people over our arrival. While we excited but small interest in the small towns on the coast, as we got closer to the front, there were delegations of women and children at the station waving to us at every small or large town through which we passed. Cries of "Vive L'Amérique" were more frequent, and we had hopes that the persistent "donnez moi" would be heard less frequently, but it was not. We never ceased hearing it as long as there were French children around.

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We arrived at Orleans late in the evening of the third day of our trip, and here we received a very hearty welcome from the American Red Cross, as we did at Tours. The station at Orleans was more like an American station than any that we had yet seen in France. It was large and equipped with several tracks, as are most American stations. Orleans is full of interest, but we were not permitted to stop there long. We continued on our journey all night and the next day were out of the Valley of the Loire and into a hilly section. While the scenery was attractive, there were fewer cultivated areas and the soil was less productive. We now began to see more of the American war activities in France. We saw tented cities that had been built for troops in record time; we saw camps where American soldiers were being drilled; and we saw great quantities of American implements of war such as airplanes, ammunition, light and heavy artillery, etc. In this region we also passed three hospital trains coming from the front with American soldiers who had been wounded, and we knew we were getting very near the fighting. We also noticed a decided difference in the French inhabitants. We detected a deeper interest in the war among these people who were so near the battle line than in those farther away, and we noted that not a young man was to be seen among the civilians in eastern France—they were all at the front fighting to save their homes from the ruthless Hun.

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At 4 o'clock in the afternoon of the fourth day after we had left Brest, we arrived at Langres, which was our destination, so far as train travel was concerned. It was a great relief to leave those crowded compartments in that uncomfortable train. The distance from Brest to Langres by the route we traveled probably does not exceed six hundred miles, yet it took us four days and three nights to make the distance. A first class American train would cover the same distance in about sixteen hours. At times our train moved so slowly that a man could get out and keep up with it by running along the side. There were no conveniences on the train, such as American travelers are accustomed to. For instance, there were no toilets, and the train would stop every three or four hours at some small station where latrines were provided for our use. No one knows how miserable we were on this trip, and the only thing that kept the boys from complaining was the fact that the country was new to us and strange sights and scenes made us forget our discomfort. Still, we did not have things as bad as some of the American boys, who were compelled to travel across France in box cars.

We were all glad to stretch our legs at Langres, and after we were given a little refreshing exercise, we were loaded on motor trucks and taken to our barracks, located in a stone building formerly used as a convent.

The city of Langres is beautifully situated. It is on a hill that rises from a plateau. It is a city of great antiquity, dating from the time of the Romans. There can be no doubt but that its original location was selected because of its strategic position, as it is on the summit of a ridge and commands the situation in every direction. In mediaeval times it was a stronghold for the feudal lords and in modern times it is still of importance as a fortress. The city is surrounded by a defense wall, built hundreds of years ago, and around the outside of the wall was a moat, wide and deep. In feudal days this moat was part of the defense works and it was kept filled with water. It was dry when we visited and has been so for many years, as a moat would be but as slight obstructure in modern warfare. But it made the city well nigh impregnable in the mediaeval days before gunpowder was invented and when most fighting was of the hand to hand kind. We entered the city through an arched gate and crossed the moat on a bridge which could be drawn up in case of attack. At present the gate is always kept lowered, but it could be drawn up if necessary. It was easy to picture in the mind's eye as we looked at these relics of former days, the feudal barons of the age of chivalry, sallying forth from this ancient stronghold on their steeds to make war or to plunder and prepared to retreat behind this moat and wall where they

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would be safe in the event that they were opposed by superior forces. I could not but think, as I stood upon this historic ground, that we ourselves were making history and that the fight that we were then preparing to make, while less romantic than the skirmishes of the feudal barons, was vastly more important to the welfare of the world.

Situated as it is upon an eminence, a view that is beyond description is to be obtained from Langres. From the ramparts one may see the upper valley of the Marne with its checkerboard of farms of various hues; the Vosges; and on a clear day the white peak of Mont Blanc, one hundred and sixty miles distant.

In strong contrast with the way in which ancient warriors entered Langres, we were loaded onto motor trucks and taken up the steep and winding way that led to the gates of the city by means of the most modern way of transportation. Our eyes were fastened on the oddities of this strangely interesting city as we wound through the streets, some of which were narrow, others wide, past well kept parks and buildings older than most of the modern governments, and we were filled with a sort of reverence for this historic spot as we took our places in the barracks made ready for us.

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CHAPTER IV

ToC

Nearing the Front

After we were installed in the barracks at Langres and had our personal belongings straightened out, we were given the day to ourselves. This was the first freedom that we had had since our arrival in France. The boys, of course, all went to the business section of the city, where many of them were given their first glimpse of French customs and French methods of merchandising. As I had been fortunate in getting into the business section of Brest while we were there, this was not new to me, but to most of the boys it was a novel experience. They spent their time and much of their money in the French stores, buying small articles of various kinds. One oddity of the freedom that we were given here was the fact that the American soldiers, although forbidden to buy alcoholic liquors in America, were permitted to buy them without restrictions in France, and it is only telling the plain truth to say that many of them sampled the French beers, wines and cognac.

I had an experience in a French barber shop that may be of interest, as it shows the difference between French and American barbers. The French barber does his work very rapidly, in fact so rapidly when he is shaving that the patron wonders whether or not he is going to get out of the chair uninjured. I ordered a haircut, a shave, a shampoo and a face massage. I had much difficulty at first in making my wants understood, particularly as to the manner in which I wanted my hair cut. This finally made clear, I sat in the chair and the barber went to work on me with his sharp shears. His hands moved like lightning and it seemed like no more than two minutes that he had the job done. It was the fastest hair cutting I ever witnessed and a good job, too. He then proceeded to shave me, and for speed he exceeded his already phenomenal record as a hair cutter. He put a thin lather on my face and then with a thin razor—the thinnest I ever saw—he slashed off a four days' growth with six strokes—one down the right cheek, one down the left cheek, one across the entire upper lip, one—a fancy curved stroke—across the chin, then up one side of the neck and a final stroke up the other. In less time than it takes to tell, the job was done, and it was a clean smooth shave too. But while he was slashing that razor around I was uneasy. It was my first and last experience with a French barber; thereafter, it was safety first. The massage was excellent, but what impressed me about the shampoo was the small amount of water used. Water must be costly in Langres from the way that barber conserved it, but with no more than a handful of water, he did his work well. The face waters used by French barbers are all highly perfumed, in fact, too much so for the rough Westerner. When a man leaves a barber shop he carries a sickening sweet aroma with him and his friends know where he has been when he is as much as a hundred yards away. It may be of interest to note that the shave, hair cut, shampoo and massage cost me two and a half francs, or a little less than 50 cents American money. The price of the same service in the average American shop at the present time (August, 1919) would be about \$1.65.

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The following day the men in our detachment were assigned to various kinds of work at Langres. I was given a motor truck to drive. It was in very poor condition and my first duty was to get it in working order. I spent three days overhauling it and had it in fair serviceable shape. But after putting all this work on it, I had the pleasure of running it only about three days, for I received orders, along with 208 others, to pack and get ready for a special course in a military school. I had only half an hour's time to get ready, but at the appointed time I was prepared to go, and with the boys chosen for the schooling, was loaded onto a motor truck and taken to Fort St. Menge, one of the numerous protecting forts around Langres. This was an old fort, apparently

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built many years ago. It was situated on the summit of a mountain and was surrounded by a moat, which, however, was dry. It was substantially built and exceedingly interesting. The barracks were built underground and of stone. They were sealed and were water-tight. Soil from ten to fifteen feet in depth covered these stone compartments and they were proof from the bombs of other days, but would have but feebly resisted the modern high explosives. There were also several tunnels leading from various parts of the interior to the outer walls, so that men could be taken to any part of the fort that might be attacked without being exposed to the enemy's fire. About a thousand men could be billeted there.

Water for this fort was supplied from two deep wells and raised by a peculiar lift pump, different from any that I ever saw before. It was a sort of combination of a lift and pressure pump and was of European design and manufacture. The wells were deep and the water good, for France.

On the day after our arrival there we commenced our work. We were given a stiff drilling for three weeks, with scarcely a minute's rest. We often worked until two or three o'clock in the morning. Our daily routine was as follows: Arise at 5 o'clock; breakfast at 6; calisthenics and manual of arms drill from 6:30 to 7:30; instruction from 8 to 12; lunch from 12 to 1; instruction from 1 to 5; evening instruction from 7 to 10, and often until 1, 2 or 3 o'clock the next morning. It was here that we received advanced learning in intelligence lines for our work in the war. [32]

We studied with French and American instruments such as were then being used by the Allied armies on the western front. I cannot describe these instruments in detail or tell much about our instruction because I have given my oath never to reveal any of the details of this work. I am permitted, however, to name some of these instruments, such as the subterranean microphone, sizerscope, horoscope, perpendicular and horizontal range finder, elongated three-power French binocular, instruments for determining the height of airplanes, etc. We had to acquire a practical knowledge in the use of all these instruments, as they were to be our future implements of warfare, and in matters of this kind, accuracy is of vast importance. We also had to learn the signals of the French, British, Italian and American aviators; the international Morse code; to send and receive messages perfectly under all conditions; to have a practical knowledge of the use of telephone and telegraph instruments; their attention and repair; and how to keep the lines of communication in working order at all times and under any and all conditions.

From this brief summary, it can be readily understood that the Government crowded plenty of work upon us during those three weeks. At the completion of the courses examinations were given, and only 86 of us out of a class of 208 succeeded in reaching the required percentage. Of the others most remained to take the course for another three weeks, while a few were released from the work as not qualified for that particular kind of service. [33]

All the time that we were studying we were drilled just as though we were actually at war. We were compelled to dig in, to find the range on certain objects and to direct imaginary artillery fire upon them. We had to find the range of airplanes that passed over us, just as though they were enemy planes. This drilling was as near like actual warfare as it was possible to make it and because of this, we grasped the meaning of our work and the details very quickly.

We were also drilled thoroughly in the art of camouflage. To be successful in camouflage, one must learn to imitate nature and that is what we had to study, and one's tracks must always be covered. A successful bit of camouflage not only deceives the eyes of the enemy aerial observers, but it also deceives the lens of the enemy camera. To make this perfectly clear, it should be said that the lens of cameras used in warfare are exceedingly delicate and frequently when the plate of an aerial photograph is developed, it reveals a spot that means some extraordinary work on the part of the enemy, which the eyes of the aviator did not detect. It can be readily understood, therefore, that unless the camera is also deceived, the camouflage has not been well done, for enemy planes, having located the spot by means of their photograph, could plan to bomb it, but if the plate did not show anything, then the camouflage is successful.

While we were at Fort St. Menge we received our gas masks and we were compelled to go through many gas mask drills. This was done so we would become efficient in putting them on when we got to the front line. With a little practice we got so we could adjust them in a remarkably short time. We were also given our steel helmets while here, and we realized fully that we were getting nearer and nearer to the scene of action, and that our sham warfare would soon give way to actual fighting. We were also drilled in rifle shooting and by the time we were ready to leave, we were in every way fit to participate in the great struggle in which we were soon to take part. [34]

As soon as our schooling was completed, we were told to get ready to leave for Langres, so we packed up and we were compelled to "hike" back to that city. At Langres we spent two days in getting ready for the front. We were ordered to leave fully equipped with the best of those things that we had to have. This meant that new articles were issued to many of us. For instance, if a man had a pair of shoes that was partly worn, he was given a new pair, and some of our old clothes were turned in for new garments. These were two busy days and our time was entirely occupied in getting ready. We were limited as to the things we could take with us. We were given our barrack bags and told to put in these bags all the things that we had to leave and that those of us who returned would receive their bags when they got back. My bag contained a number of toilet articles, clothes and other articles that I took with me from the United States. I never saw that bag again, as I was gassed and wounded and never went back to Langres, but I suppose that it has long since become the property of some one else.

When we were ready to leave Langres we marched with full equipment to a station three miles

from the barracks we were leaving, where we were billeted in wooden billets. Here we spent the night. We had to get up at 4 o'clock in the morning to take an early train. It was a bitter cold morning, but we did not notice this much, as we were on our way to the scene of action and our thoughts were on the future. A cup of coffee, a couple of doughnuts and a bun was the only breakfast that we had, but it was all we wished. We carried traveling rations, of which we made good use later on. We boarded the train at 4:30 o'clock and rode on a fast passenger train until 11 o'clock, when we arrived at Toul. We traveled in second and third class passenger coaches. At Toul we were well received by the Red Cross, which furnished us with some food, and this, together with our traveling rations, provided us with a hearty meal.

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We left Toul at 1 o'clock and marched toward the front. We were soon within the sound of the heavy guns. We continued on the road for several hours, and then, as we were getting into the zone where shells fell occasionally, we were told to thin out our ranks so that if a shell fell among us our casualties would be light. From then on, we marched about eight or ten feet apart in single file on each side of the road. We were ordered to wear our steel helmets as a protection against shrapnel. Some did not see the need of doing this, but most of us were glad to take the precaution. We crossed several narrow gauge tracks on our march, and saw trains carrying supplies of all kinds to the battle front. They were pulled by gasoline engines. We also saw our first barbed wire entanglements. These were built back of the lines as a protection to the French in case the Germans should break through on that front. They were about twenty-five feet in width and extended north and south as far as the eye could see. Later on we saw barbed wire entanglements as much as 250 feet in width, put up as a barrier to the Boche, should they break through.

Airplanes were now very numerous. They were darting back and forth at various heights. We were anxious to see an airplane battle, but none took place on that front on that day. We could see observation balloons in the distance. Those in the very far distance we knew to be enemy observers.

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We marched until 7 o'clock, when we reached a woods, where we were permitted to stop. We were given our evening meal, which consisted of bully beef and hard tack. The woods was our sheltering place for the night. Some of the boys said they slept well that night, but I will be absolutely truthful and say that I did not. The knowledge that we were under shell fire and the unforeseen events that the immediate future held in store for me so weighed upon my mind that I could scarcely close my eyes. I really do not understand how any of the boys slept. We could hear the screech of the shells as they whizzed by, but, fortunately, none of them hit near us. Only a few days before several hundred American boys were gassed in this same woods, and our gas guard kept a close watch for gas shells.

The next day we proceeded on toward the Verdun front. We marched all day long, with only occasional stops. We were not in the open, however, going from one woods to another; when we marched in the open, only small bodies of men would move at a time. At 11 p.m. we stopped marching and made our camp for the night. Most of the boys were so weary from their long "hike" that they wrapped up in their overcoats, lay down on the ground and went right to sleep. We remained three days here waiting for orders. We were near the front, could hear the guns all the time and the occasional rattle of a machine gun. When our orders did finally come, we were told to march back over part of the same route we had come and we finally stopped close to Novient. It was here that we saw our first action and it was here that we finished our education in the work that we were to do under the supervision of the French, who held this front before it was taken over by the Americans.

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CHAPTER V.

ToC

Preparation for Battle

We were billeted at Novient for three days in wrecks of buildings that had been ruined by Hun shells. At first we did not do much work because it was not definitely known whether or not we were to remain there.

Although we were in the war zone and under shell fire at all times, we were amazed when we learned that there were still a few French peasants in the vicinity. These were mostly old men and old women, and a few, but very few, children. These peasants would not leave their old homes, though requested to do so by the French Government. They preferred to remain there and be killed by a Hun Shell, if that was to be their fate, than to leave the spot that they so dearly loved. The young men of these towns were all fighting at the front and the young women had gone to the larger cities, farther from the front, where they found employment at good wages.

Most of these old peasants kept a cow or two and a few chickens and they sold milk and eggs to

the American soldiers, thus realizing a small profit for their great hazard. We paid seven francs or about \$1.35 for a dozen eggs and four francs or about 70 cents for a gallon of milk. We were indeed glad to get these luxuries, even at these prices and considered ourselves fortunate. In Novient two beer shops were also conducted and sold the soldiers light wines and beers, the prices being one franc or nearly 20 cents for a small bottle of beer, five francs for a bottle of red wine and from seven to ten francs for a bottle of white wine.

After three days at Novient, we moved forward toward the trenches, where we were to complete our training for work in the Flash Service. At this time we were divided into small detachments, there being fourteen men in the detachment to which I was assigned. We were taken to a woods about a mile and a half from Novient, and there had our first introduction to the French S. R. O. T., or service similar to our Flash Service. [38]

In this woods we were billeted underground, where we were protected from shell fire. Each detachment was billeted with an equal number of French, and it was from the fourteen French in our detachment that we were to complete our education for the special work for which we were preparing. In other words, we were to learn the practical application from the French of the knowledge that we had learned in the school at Fort St. Menge.

Our first experience in actual war work was in an observation tower in this woods. This tower was 65 feet in height. It was cylindrical in form and built of steel about half an inch in thickness. The interior was about five feet in diameter. In the tank (so-called) was a lookout post for observation work. It had small slits on all sides that could be readily opened and shut, through which we were to take our observations. We entered the tower through a trap door in the bottom, and the men working at the post locked the door while they were at their duty. The tower was erected in a thick growth of tall trees, and was well camouflaged. It was securely hidden from Hun eyes, yet gave us a full view of the Hun trenches in that vicinity. It was from this tower that I first saw the enemy, and got my first glimpse of the Hun lines and got my first full view of a modern battlefield.

The French outer trench was only one-quarter of a mile from this tower. The German trenches were just a little way beyond those of the French, the distance varying from fifty yards to a quarter of a mile, according to the terrain. With our strong glasses, we could get an excellent view of everything that Fritz did in this part of the line.

In this tower the French taught us their secrets of observation in modern warfare. They showed us how to locate German batteries, machine gun nests, railroads, troop movements, supply trains, aerial activity, observation balloons, etc. We paid particular attention to watching how often Hun airplanes arose, where they crossed our lines, whether or not they were fired on by our anti-aircraft guns, the number of Hun planes in the air, the purpose of their flights, etc. It was particularly important to get the point where the German aviators crossed the Allied lines. Their planes followed a system in this so as to try to avoid our anti-aircraft guns. They would cross at a certain point for one or two days, then, believing that if they attempted to cross there again they would meet with a warm reception, they would change the location, thus keeping the Allies guessing all the time. The French remained with us about ten days, during which time we acquired sufficient knowledge to take up the work ourselves, and the American troops then took over this section of the line. [39]

Our conveniences while here were not good, but they were as good as we expected. We accepted our lot without protest. All our provisions had to be carried in at night on our backs, as it would have been dangerous for a supply train to attempt to bring anything in during the day. There was no water at all in our immediate vicinity. That which we used for cooking and drinking purposes had to be carried from a spring about three-quarters of a mile distant. While going to this spring on one occasion, we located a blackberry patch, which gave us a little diversion. We conserved our flour for several days, and then picked enough blackberries for pie. On two occasions we had blackberry pie and it is no exaggeration to say that it was absolutely the best morsel of food that any of us had ever tasted. It was a luxury, I venture to say, that but few soldiers in the extreme front line trenches were privileged to enjoy. [40]

A few days after the French left this front to us, we became aware that we were preparing for some big military manoeuver. What it was, of course, we were not told; we knew, however, that it was to be on a gigantic scale. It subsequently developed that we were preparing for the great St. Mihiel drive, that wonderful independent plunge into German lines by American troops, which straightened out the St. Mihiel salient and showed definitely to the Germans that ultimately they were to be defeated.

A brief description of this preparation may be of interest. Our first intimation of this manoeuver was the bringing up of great quantities of ammunition. This was placed in the woods and well camouflaged. Next, heavy artillery came up in greater quantities than we had any idea that the American army had in France. Then light artillery was brought up in numbers proportional to the heavy guns. Then thousands of fresh troops were marched up and placed under the cover of the woods. These men marched up at night, so as not to be seen by Hun airplanes. It should be stated here that during this preparation Allied air machines had complete mastery of the aerial situation and as soon as a Hun plane appeared on the horizon, it was pursued until it either was brought down, or it escaped back to its lines.

While the infantry was stationed in these woods, no time was lost. The men were given their final instructions in fighting Bosch. They were drilled hard every day and they became particularly efficient in the use of the bayonet, a weapon that in the hands of a Yank the Germans fear worse than anything else that I know of. Rifle practice, of course, could not be indulged in

while in these woods, because the noise might attract German attention, but bayonet drills never ceased. Thorough drilling was also given in the use of machine guns. Men were instructed how to repair guns, were told what to do in case certain parts of the gun were injured, were shown how to take guns apart and put them together again, and before the end of the drilling, these men became as efficient in machine gun work as Fritz himself.

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The last step of the preparation was the bringing up of the tanks. These came up at night in great numbers. There were tanks of all kinds, from the huge British machines to the "petite" or little French tank. These were also camouflaged and concealed in the woods. After the tanks were brought up, their gunners were given a final thorough drilling in the use of their guns, their machines, etc. We had never before seen such a vast equipment of war material.

It is difficult to express my feelings during the final days of this preparation. I knew that something of a gigantic nature had been planned and that the time was close at hand. I also knew that whatever it was it would surely succeed, for nothing could resist the combined force of all that preparation when the final word was given. I cannot but admit that enormous quantity of ammunition, the vast number of light and heavy guns, the thousands of men ready for the fray, caused me to feel a certain indescribable sadness, for I knew, that although success was sure to follow our drive, some of these brave boys were to pay the price with their lives. On September 11th, the boys were drilled for the last time. We were then required to strip our bodies of all our clothes and to smear ourselves with a salve. This was a preparation that was designed to protect the body from burns in case we encountered the deadly mustard gas.

After dark and all during the night there was a steady stream of men going to their positions in the trenches. They knew that the time for the manoeuver to start was near, but whether it was to be 24 or 48 hours, they did not know. But we of the Flash Service did; we knew that at one minute past midnight on the morning of September 12th, the zero hour, the Germans were to be given their great surprise party, and we counted the minutes as they were ticked off the watch until that time arrived.

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CHAPTER VI

ToC

The Great St. Mihiel Drive

It was exactly at 12:01 o'clock on the morning of September 12th, when the great St. Mihiel drive began, and when all the preparation of which I told in the preceding chapter was brought into play in the first great independent movement of American troops, which was to give the Germans a warning of what they were to expect from the army from across the seas, of which they had so sneeringly spoken. The drive opened with a demoralizing barrage, the greatest of the kind that, up to that time, had ever been laid down by artillery. It greatly exceeded in the number of guns brought into action and in amount of ammunition used, any barrage that either the Germans or the Allies had, prior to that time, attempted. It was like letting hell loose upon the Germans in the salient at all points within the range of our guns. Language is inadequate to describe this barrage and none except those who were actual participants in the drive will be able to visualize in the mind the terror that General Pershing's guns belched forth on that momentous occasion. Those who have imaginative minds may be able to form some faint conception of what this great battle was like, if they can picture thousands of guns—heavy, medium and light—belching forth their fire with ceaseless regularity for six long hours. It was pitch dark when the first guns opened with their roar, but it was not long before the heavens were lighted with a brilliant pyrotechnic display, something like elaborate Fourth of July fireworks, but multiplied by millions in intensity. The heavy artillery spit forth long flames as they were discharged. The long flash, the rapidity with which it is dashed from the gun muzzle, and its sudden disappearance, reminded me of a serpent's tongue. And serpents' tongues they were, indeed, to German hopes, for as sure as these are facts, the St. Mihiel drive sealed the doom of the despised Huns. As far as the eye could see, these flashes were being repeated at stated intervals, and in front of them were the smaller and more rapid flashes of the medium artillery; and adding their flame, smoke and noise to the din far out in front was the famous light artillery, which did such effective work throughout the war.

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It was not long after the barrage began before the Germans began to throw star shells. These were for the purpose of lighting up No Man's Land. They are thrown to a height of several hundred feet, and as they slowly descend, they burn a brilliant white light. These added to the brilliancy of the fireworks. The object of the Germans in throwing these star shells was to keep No Man's Land lighted so as to be ready to repel our attack. They knew, of course, that our barrage was to be followed up with a charge, but they did not know at what hour it was to be launched. The star shells were thrown so that they could not be taken unawares in the dark.

Far behind the line in Fritz' territory we could see our shells bursting. The telltale flash meant that the Huns were getting a dose of severe medicine, though we could at that moment only guess at the destruction that was being wrought. Later we were to see the havoc worked by our accurate artillerymen.

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The object of this demoralizing barrage was to break up the morale of the Germans and in general to pave the way for our infantry charge that was to follow. It shattered the German trenches, plowed through their barbed wire entanglements and kept those who survived in a state of great nervous tension, because they knew a great charge was to follow. Our guns were also trained on such objects as headquarters, railroads, heavy artillery emplacements, cross roads, ammunition dumps, aviation hangars, etc., from information that had previously been obtained by the Flash and Sound Ranging sections. The heavy artillery did great damage far in the rear. The medium artillery, not having the range of the heavy guns, did not reach so far back with its fire, but demoralized things generally wherever its shells hit. It also had for its purpose the breaking up of any attack that might be planned as a counter offensive. The light artillery is of smaller caliber and fires more rapidly. This did wonderful execution and was a great help in winning the war.

It was exactly 6 o'clock when the demoralizing barrage stopped, and it was followed by a protecting barrage. There is quite a difference between a demoralizing barrage and a protecting barrage. A demoralizing barrage is just what its name signifies, a demoralizing rain of shells upon the enemy. A protecting barrage is for the purpose of protecting the infantry as it charges into the enemy's lines and it is raised slowly as the infantry advances so as to keep over the heads of the marching soldiers. As soon as the protecting barrage was fired in this drive, the first waves of infantry went over the top.

Most people have a misconception of what going over the top is. The prevailing idea is that a great mass of troops rush over the top and into the German trenches. What really occurs is this: The men climb out of the trenches at an ordinary pace in a thin line from six to ten feet apart. This is followed in a few seconds by another thin line about the same distance apart, and then another, and so on until there are thousands of men advancing over No Man's Land, but they are scattered over a large area. The object in scattering them is to reduce losses in case an enemy shell falls among them. I have seen a shell fall among men advancing this way without hitting any of them, and I have also seen several fall from a single shell. Another reason for these thin waves is the fact that when advancing in this formation the men offer a poorer target to the machine guns of the enemy, while in mass formation, a machine gun could mow down in a short time a whole company.

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Just ahead of the waves of infantry in this drive, wiggled the tanks. These cumbersome, awkward, ugly but efficient machines were of great help to the foot soldiers. They not only made a path through the barbed wire entanglements that the artillery had not destroyed, but they hunted out and destroyed German machine gun nests, which were so dangerous to the infantry. The tanks had a very difficult task and they performed it well. Too much credit cannot be given to the tank crews. They were brave, skillful and good fighters. It is true they were in a measure protected behind the steel walls of the machine, but, on the other hand, they were exposed to heavy fire, it was hot and disagreeable within and in case of being struck by a shell or running onto a mine, the horrors were worse than those to which other fighters were exposed. The greatest danger was that of being trapped within and burned to death in case a shell hits the gasoline tank; a number were destroyed in that manner. So I give full credit to the tank men for their heroic services—they braced the greatest dangers without knowing such a word as "fear."

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As our boys went over the top they were given the protection of an aerial squadron. Only those who were advancing toward the Hun lines on that day, with full realization of their duties and their dangers, know what a feeling of protection these hovering planes gave us. They flew low, frequently just over the heads of the men, and poured their deadly machine gun fire into such of the Hun trenches as the artillery had not destroyed—and, no matter how thoroughly the artillery does its work, there is always plenty left for the other branches of the army to do. These daring airmen also dropped fishtail bombs on the Huns. These men were the bravest of the brave. They had the courage, grit and combative qualities of the lion. They are constantly in great danger. They are fired upon from below by enemy anti-aircraft guns, and frequently from above by enemy planes. They are also exposed, when they fly low, to rifle fire and machine guns and machines are frequently brought down by such fire. During a drive of this kind they also face the danger of running into their own barrage and are restricted as to the area in which they may manoeuver. We cannot give these fearless men of the flying corps too much praise for their work. While men in all branches of the American army were brave and all did their duty, I think the airmen, like the tank men, deserve a special meed of praise for their daring, and when I say this, I intend in no way to detract from the bravery of the men in any other branch of the service.

The Flash Service, to which I belonged, was not a fighting unit. While we were heavily armed, so that we could defend ourselves and fight if necessary, we were not, in the strict sense of the word, combatants. It was more important for us to keep the lines of communication in working order, to give the artillery the range on certain objects, to locate machine gun nests and direct fire upon them so they could be destroyed, than to fight, for there were sufficient numbers in other branches of the army for that purpose. But we did not overlook an opportunity to help our cause, and it is with a great deal of pleasure that I tell of a machine gun nest of thirteen men captured by three of the men of our detachment, though of a different post from mine. It was during the early morning of the first day of the drive. It should be stated that the American infantry advanced so rapidly that it frequently went right by carefully concealed machine gun

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nests. This was just what the Germans wanted them to do, because they opened fire from the rear and rained bullets on our men from two sides. The three men that captured the nest of which I am telling were just in back of the second wave of infantry that went over the top, following it up for the purpose of establishing our line of communication from front to rear. They came upon this nest as the Huns were preparing to fire at our advancing men. When they first located the nest the Americans had their revolvers carefully wrapped in greased coils and in their holsters, not expecting to use them—the greased coils being to keep the weapons from rusting from the dampness of the trenches. These resourceful American boys lost no time, however, in getting their weapons ready for use, and by a quick and intrepid manoeuvre, they approached the Huns, covered them with their revolvers, and compelled them to surrender without so much as firing a shot. The Huns were taken to the rear, and their gun, a Vicker, became a trophy of war.

It was about 9 o'clock in the morning while we were advancing that I came upon a petite French tank, which had run upon a Hun mine and had been completely destroyed. The machine was reduced to a pile of junk, and it was hardly believable that a mine would work such destruction. The heavy iron was torn in shreds, and while we knew it was a tank and we knew what had happened to it, it was now nothing but scrap iron. [48]

Just about that time the infantry was capturing thousands of Hun prisoners—men who had occupied the front German trenches and who were overcome by our boys. As I was advancing, I saw 3,700 German prisoners marching to the rear, and as it was still early in the day, you may know with what thoroughness our boys were doing their work. Among these prisoners was a German officer who knew the location of the mines that had been planted to destroy tanks, bridges, roads, etc. The Americans were not long in learning this and they compelled him to point out these locations. Under his guidance, 52 mines were destroyed. These might have done great damage to American tanks and soldiers if they had not been set off. As it was, they opened a pathway through which our tanks passed without danger.

As we went forward into the territory that had been held by the Huns, we could see the results of our own work, that is to say, we could see objects upon which we had given the range to the artillery, completely destroyed. It was gratifying to note that our work and the work of the artillery had been so accurate. Objects, such as headquarters, railroad tracks, cross roads, that we had located through our strong glasses before the drive, and upon which we had given the distance to the gunners, had been shattered by direct hits, speaking wonders for the marksmanship of the American gunners. At some places we saw scores of men and animals that had been killed by shell fire; at others we saw trenches that had been as completely wiped out as though they never existed; we also saw ammunition dumps that had been hit and set afire and which burned steadily for several days. These were exceedingly dangerous places, and we kept a good distance from them until they burned completely out, as the exploding shells threw flying metal for a distance of a hundred yards or more. We also came across railroad trains that had been hit as they were proceeding, and so badly crippled that they had to be abandoned by the enemy, later to be captured by us. [49]

We advanced about ten kilometers the first day, and then our men were directed to dig in. Here we met with our first real resistance. The enemy counter attacked during the night, but his charges were finally broken up by our accurate fire.

Our advance that day had been rapid and had penetrated deeply into the enemy line. This had been possible because of the rapidity with which our supplies had been brought up. The roads for the most part were not badly cut up, and those that were damaged were quickly repaired by our engineers. Bridges had been hastily built, obstructions removed from highways, and shell holes filled in so that traffic could go on almost uninterruptedly. This made it possible for all necessary munitions to move forward.

One thing that was annoying to our advance was the German "pill boxes" in which machine gunners were placed. These pill boxes were of concrete. They were round and flat, a few square, and took their name because of their resemblance to a pill box. They had slits about six inches wide and eighteen inches long in the concrete through which the Huns fired their machine guns at our troops. Our most effective weapon against these pill boxes was our one pounders. They fired a small shell directly at the box and continued to fire until they got the range of the slit. The shells would then penetrate the slit and hit the other side of the box, exploding when they did so, and killing or wounding the occupants. Once the range was obtained, our gunners kept pouring in these shells until there was no longer any fear that the Fritz soldiers in that box would harm any more Americans. Our boys put many of these pill boxes out of commission with big loss to the enemy. They made duty in a pill box certain death for the Huns when any Americans were around. [50]

We spent a rather restless night after our first day's advance. Though we had marched many miles and were mentally and physically fatigued, it was not easy to sleep. We were in constant danger of counter attack and of being shelled by the enemy, and the sensation was not pleasant.

Early in the morning of September 13th, the second day of the drive, we advanced again in the gray of the early dawn. It was between 8 and 9 o'clock on this morning that I saw a great aerial fight in which probably thirty-five and perhaps forty machines participated. We had advanced so far the first day that the Germans sent their aircraft out in numbers on the second day to look at the territory that had been lost. Our men were ready for them. It was the most thrilling sight I ever witnessed, and I cannot imagine anything more sensational. At first these machines were very high in the air, perhaps ten thousand feet, for they were mere specks in the sky to the natural vision. It was wonderful to see them manoeuvring for positions of advantage. They

twisted, turned, looped and dove. At times two or three would be very close together and then again they would separate. Little white puffs of smoke told the tale that the machine guns were in action. They reminded me of bees swarming, as they buzzed and circled around each other in the air. As they fought they descended, coming nearer to earth and thus plainer to our vision. Suddenly one dropped out of the ranks, a struck machine. We knew it was permanently out of commission the minute it started to fall, for it dropped like a dead bird. It was a Hun machine and it dropped close to where I was located, so close in fact that within a few minutes I was inspecting it and taking small souvenirs to send home from its collapsed wings. Then another dropped, but it fell far from where we were located and its descent was so swift that we could not see its insignia and were unable to tell whether or not it was a Hun machine. Then one came down wounded, but still able to fly. It was an American machine, for it sought refuge in back of our lines. And so the fight continued for a few minutes—it did not last long—until a total of eight machines dropped and several others flew away wounded. Just what percentage of Hun and Allied planes fell, I was never able to ascertain, but the best evidence that the majority of them were Hun machines was the fact that the remaining enemy planes soon departed from the aerial battle field, leaving the Allied planes in complete control. The Allied fleet of planes in this fight was composed mostly of Americans, though our airmen were aided by a couple of British and a couple of French machines.

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We continued our advance throughout the second day, though we did not proceed as rapidly as on the first day. This was because the roads were in poorer condition and supplies could not be so rapidly moved forward and for the further reason that the country was more wooded and offered Fritz a better opportunity for defense. Our boys were counter-attacked on several occasions, but each time they sent the Huns flying to the rear with heavy losses. In hand to hand fighting, such as often resulted when counter attacks were lodged, the Germans were no match for the Americans, who seemed to excel in close work which required bravery, skill and dash. In fact, it was in this kind of work that our boys showed Fritz what we mean in America by "punch."

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On the third day we advanced as far as Thiaccourt, which was our objective. On this day we also met with stubborn resistance. It was here that we encountered many pill boxes and it required considerable difficult and accurate work to put them out of business.

It was on the night of September 15th that we saw our hardest fighting, and were given a taste of how hard Germans could fight when pressed. It was on this night that our losses were the heaviest of the drive.

My post was dug in on a ridge that was occupied by a detachment of incomparable fighters—the Marines. The ridge was only about 500 yards in length. The roads being in bad condition, we were unable to get the protection of any artillery. All that we had to keep Fritz at bay on this ridge was about forty machine guns, which were no match for the heavy shells that the Huns were pouring on us, having our range to a nicety. We were in what is known as "graves," or shallow trenches, not having had time to dig deep trenches or to strengthen our positions as we were constantly under fire. But these Marines laid down a machine gun barrage, the first that I had ever seen. They kept up the fire all night and thus held Fritz away. It was a tense period. Hun shells were dropping all around us and frequently right among us, but the machine guns never ceased their excellent defensive work. When day broke, and the Hun ceased firing, only seventeen of these machine guns and their crews were in condition to fight. Twenty-three of them had been destroyed by the German artillery. It was a sad sight that met our eyes the morning when we saw the losses that we had suffered during the night.

It was on the night of the fourth day of the drive that fresh men were brought up, and those of us who had been out in front during the drive were relieved. It was, indeed, a great relief. It permitted us to relax our bodies and minds after four days of steady strain, with no more food than was sufficient to sustain us and without rest during the entire time. We were grateful to be away for a short time from the devastating fire that the Huns were pouring into our front line trenches in an endeavor to check a further penetration into their lines, but we were still under shell fire.

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We were taken a short distance to the rear, where we were billeted in German dugouts. The day before these had been occupied by German officers. They were elaborately fitted up with all things necessary for luxury and comfort, such as beds, bathtubs, electric lights, etc.

It was here, seemingly as a reward for my small services in the great fight, that I met my friend and companion, McKinley Johnston, of Sacramento. Nothing could have pleased me more for McKinley Johnston is like a brother to me, having been my companion since boyhood. It was with him that I had talked of enlisting long before I volunteered, and it was he who enlisted with me. Though we became soldiers together and entered the same company, the fortunes of war separated us in France, and united us at a moment that was most gratifying to us both. We sat down together and related our experiences. He was driving a truck, and from him I learned of remarkable escapes that he had had from death during the four days of the drive. On one occasion a Hun shell, sufficient in size to have blown him to atoms, lodged in his truck among supplies and failed to explode. I saw the shell myself, also saw the hole in the top of the truck through which it passed and can vouch for the truthfulness of the story. On another occasion a shrapnel shell exploded on the road just to the right of his truck. When it burst, it sent small pieces of metal flying in all directions. About twenty-five or thirty of these passed through his truck, but not one struck him. I saw the holes they made. The motor of the truck was not as fortunate as the driver. A number of the pieces passed through the hood and lodged in the engine. It was damaged considerably, but it still ran and McKinley was able to complete his trip. I marveled at these stories because they concerned a young man of whom I am very fond, but

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escapes of this kind were numerous in these days and almost every soldier who passed through the drive can truthfully tell of similar escapes. We were facing death all the time and the remarkable thing is that so many of us did pass through the drive and come out alive.

CHAPTER VII

ToC

Gassed

One of the happiest days that I experienced during the period that I was at war was on Friday, September 20, 1918. On this day, after having made several visits to our new posts in the front line, I came back to our billet, where, to my delight and surprise, I found eight letters from home awaiting me. No one knows the joy that a letter from home gives to a soldier on the firing line. It is like taking him out of hell and placing him back on earth again. For several days we had been in the very thickest of the fight, facing death at every minute, seeing our companions fall around us, doing everything we possibly could to help our side win, and willing to go back and do it all over again without complaint—and then to get these welcome letters from dear ones 9,000 miles away right in the midst of it all. Is it any wonder that on such occasions we frequently gave way to our emotions?

The letters that I received were enjoyed not only by me, but by my companion, McKinley Johnston, as well, as he knew all of my people and was as familiar as I was with the things that they wrote about. It is a peculiar circumstance, but it is a fact, nevertheless, that all of the boys, even those who did not know my folks and who came from other States than California, were interested in these letters. They were news from home and that is what all the boys were craving. They wanted to read anything that came from America. So, after reading the letters, I passed them all around and every boy in the camp read them. After getting the letters back, I read them over several times. Several of them contained photographs of familiar scenes and faces, and it seemed good to look upon them again, for no one knew but that it might be the last time we would see them. I thought it would be a nice thing to sit right down and write, after reading these letters, but when I attempted it, I was so overcome with emotion caused by thoughts of those who were near and dear to me, that I was unable to give expression to my thoughts. [55]

The position of the American troops at this time was not favorable. The enemy held the commanding ground, and was concealed in woods, while our troops were out in the open. The Boche could see what we were doing while we were unable to detect his moves. This disadvantage, you might well know, would not long be tolerated by Americans. We wanted the commanding ground and we wanted to put Fritz in the open. So on Monday, September 23rd, we gave Fritz a three-hour barrage and it was a hot one. By the time the barrage started, all our light artillery had been brought up and put in place, and we were able to rain shells from the famous 75's upon the enemy in torrents. This barrage was for the purpose of breaking up the morale of the Germans. We were counter-barraged by the Huns, and for a time they made it hot for us. But our superiority began to show after about an hour's firing. The men in the Flash Division worked hard to give our gunners the correct location of the German batteries. We worked hard and fast and the accuracy of our effort was shown by the silencing of the German guns. One by one they ceased firing, as the American artillery, with the data we supplied them, dropped shells on the Hun batteries. [56]

It was just about 5:45 in the morning when our artillery ceased firing and our boys advanced again. This time our objectives were only about two kilometers in back of the German front trenches. We met with stubborn resistance at first, but with the usual American determination and pluck, we soon forced the Boche back.

It was here that I first saw the German minnewafers and trench mortars at work. The shells thrown from the minnewafers are as much feared as any German weapon of war. They are thrown from a large gun with a smooth bore and short barrel. The projectile is shaped like a rolling pin, though it is much larger. In each end, or handle of the shell, is a cap, which explodes as the handle strikes the ground. As the projectile somersaults as it travels, one handle or the other is sure to hit the earth, so there are no "duds" that I saw among these shells. They explode with a terrific racket and tear up the earth for a great distance around the spot where they land. They are not thrown very high in the air, and are intended for use in close fighting, that is to say, two or three hundred yards. As the shells whirl through the air, you can plainly hear them whistling, and if you look sharply you can occasionally see them coming. These minnewafers and mortars are of various ranges—from three and four inches up to twelve and fourteen inches. Aside from these trench guns, the Germans in this fight also resisted heavily with machine gun nests and one pounders. [57]

In going over the top this time, we did not have the protection that we did when the St. Mihiel

drive started. In other words, we did not have any tanks or any aerial protection, but had to advance with only such help as the artillery could give us.

The Germans were well protected and it took clever work to outwit them. Their machine gun nests were always cleverly concealed. Many of them were concealed in trees, and it was a common sight to see our infantrymen advance unseen by the machine gunners, and then with their rifles, shoot them out of the trees. I had seen machine gun nests in trees before, but never so many as this time. Not only were they numerous, but they were so well provided with ammunition that they could fire thousands of rounds of shells, if necessary. I have seen long belts of cartridges hanging to limbs of trees, all ready for use on the part of the gunners. I have also seen many of these belts attached together so as to provide an almost endless chain of cartridges for the gun. Under one tree where there had been a nest, I saw empty cartridge shells eight inches deep, which was some shooting for a short fight such as this was. That machine gun had certainly done all that could be expected of it.

We gained our objectives at 4 o'clock of the afternoon of the day the drive started. We were then in the best possible position, so far as ground is concerned, as it was possible for us to occupy. We had taken the commanding ground from Fritz, and we began digging in so as to be ready for a counter attack. All during that night we dug our trenches, making them deep and as safe as possible. Between 3 and 5 o'clock the next morning, the expected attack came. We experienced a heavy shelling from the German artillery. Of course, our light artillery that had been hastily brought up was not slow in returning the fire. Our barrage was very accurate and eventually the Huns were silenced. [58]

It was at this time that I was called upon to witness the greatest horror of war—that of seeing some of my dearest friends fall from the enemy's fire before my very eyes. I was working in a post with three other men. We had been constantly together since the drive began and our hardships that we had undergone resulted in a bond of friendship that held us together like brothers. All three of these men were killed during this barrage. Two of them were instantly killed and the third lived but a short time after being hit, dying about 6 o'clock in the morning.

When you consider that we were working in a post that was not more than twelve feet in diameter, you may well imagine my feelings as I saw these boys fall. I fully expected that my turn would come at any minute, but I kept at work so as to keep my mind off the gruesome surroundings.

The next twenty-four hours were about the worst that I experienced throughout the war. My post was right out in front, and I was the only man left in it. Our communication lines had been badly cut up by German shells, and I was unable to make a report of the disaster that our post had suffered to headquarters. I could not leave the post, because I could not leave the instruments. They were too valuable to be left there with no one guarding them, and it would not do to leave any chance of their falling into the hands of the enemy. So I remained at the post all day. About 7 o'clock in the evening, men from headquarters fixed the communicating lines and I made my report of the loss of three men. Help was immediately dispatched to me, but, because we were heavily shelled again that night by the Huns, it was impossible for aid to reach me. It was not until 4 o'clock the next morning that a detachment reached the post and I was relieved. [59]

A detachment was also sent from headquarters for the purpose of removing the bodies of my three dead companions. They were taken back of the lines to a beautiful spot in the woods, and there they were buried. Because of the fondness of the men of our detachment for these and for the further reason that fighting had slackened up some, we were able to give these men a little better burial than is accorded most soldiers who fall on the field of battle. In most cases a grave is dug, the body wrapped in a blanket and deposited without a casket and without ceremony. But for these boys, some of the men in our detachment made boxes to serve as coffins out of material that we had captured from an engineering dump. One big grave was dug and the bodies were laid in it side by side. One of the boys said a prayer and the graves of these brave lads, way out there in the woods in France, were covered over. This is one of the incidents of the war that will never leave my mind, as two of the boys were among my dearest friends.

I realize that my escape from death while at that post was by a narrow margin. It seemed to be the beginning of a number of miraculous escapes, such as many soldiers experience. Mine came in such rapid succession that I began to have a feeling that Fritz would get me yet. About 11 o'clock at night on the 30th of September I was aroused from my bed in a dugout to repair the communication lines, it being part of the duty of our detachment to keep the lines in working order when not observing. It wasn't very pleasant, of course, to get out of bed in the middle of the night, but this was the luckiest call that I had ever had. I had not been out more than five minutes when Fritz scored a direct hit with a big shell upon that billet, destroying everything it in. If I had not been called out, I would have been killed. Fortunately for our post, all the other members were on duty at the time, so we all escaped. But while I escaped with my life, the shell destroyed all of my personal belongings. This resulted in my discomfiture for many days, as I will relate. I had previously captured a pair of German officer's boots, which I would put on when called out at night, rather than my regulation army shoes and leggins. On this night I slipped on these boots, and my army shoes were torn to shreds. Therefore, I was compelled to wear the German boots, and they were the most uncomfortable things that I had ever had on my feet. Though they were my size, I could not get used to them, and they burned and blistered my heels so that I could hardly walk. As we were way out in front, it was not easy to get new shoes from headquarters. My foot troubles became so serious that my officer granted me a day off duty for the purpose of trying to find a pair of shoes that would fit me. I spent the entire time in a fruitless search. I found several pairs of shoes that belonged to boys who had been killed, but they would [60]

not fit me, so finally I had to give it up. I wore those Boche boots sixteen days, and I had to keep going all the time with sore and blistered feet. I suffered more from those German boots than from anything else in the war.

On October 4th I had another interesting experience and narrow escape, which was as close as any that I ever want to experience. I was one of a detail that was sent after water. We had to go from our dugouts a distance of about two kilometers. On our way there we were walking in a gully. Fritz had probably used that gully for the same purpose himself when he held that ground, and he probably knew that we would be using it too. At any rate, he had the range to a nicety. On our way he first dropped a number of gas shells around us. We hastily put on our masks and escaped injury. But the gas shells were followed by a few high explosives. A flying fragment severed the air tube of my gas mask. This meant immediate death, unless there was quick action. I had the presence of mind to take hold of the tube, so as to prevent any gas from entering my lungs, and then I ran to high ground. The reason I sought high ground is because the chlorine gas is heavy and settles in low places and is not likely to be as thick if high ground can be reached. I was accompanied by one of the buddies, who saw my plight and ran to assist me. By a stroke of luck that seems almost unbelievable, we ran across a salvage dump on the ridge to which we ran, and there we found a good gas mask, which I hurriedly slipped on, and used until a new one was issued to me. As if to add insult to injury, while I was having trouble with the mask, I was struck on the shoulder by a piece of shrapnel. The fragment, however, had about spent its force, and while I was knocked down by the force of the blow and suffered from a bruised shoulder for several days, the skin was not broken and my injury did not reach the dignity of a wound.

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We proceeded on and got our water, and on our way back we were shelled again when we were in approximately the same place. This time one of the men received a small scratch from a piece of flying shell. It just broke the skin between the knee and the thigh, but was so small that it did not cause any inconvenience. Shortly after this, another bit of shrapnel hit my helmet and knocked it off my head. I gave the boys cause for a hearty laugh as I scrambled on all fours after my "tin derby," and no doubt I cut an amusing figure. Fritz seemed to be picking on me all day, but I was glad that I got off so lightly after being exposed to so much danger.

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There is no room for sentiment in the army. Birthdays usually don't mean much. It just happened, however, that I had a day off of post on October 6th, and, that being my birthday, the occasion was made doubly pleasant. But the thing that made the day a perfect one for me was the fact that when I reached headquarters I found fourteen letters from home. I have already told how happy I felt when I received eight letters—well, fourteen made me feel just twice that happy. They were from relatives and friends and no gift could have made my birthday more pleasant.

October 16th was another red letter day for me. On that date I had a detail to pack in supplies, and I had the great fortune to find a new pair of shoes, just my size. What a relief to get rid of those uncomfortable ill-fitting, detestable German boots. If there was one thing that made me hate Germans worse than anything else, it was those horrid German boots. The boys said they were a hoodoo and that if I continued to wear them Fritz would get me sure. However that may be, I did not cease to have close calls. The very next day I got a small sniff of chlorination gas. It happened while I was fixing communication lines. I did not get enough to hurt me, but it made me deathly sick. I was unable to do much for a couple of days, and was taken to headquarters, where I was assigned to the duty of fixing communication lines, which were constantly in danger of being broken. On October 24th two of us were sent to repair a break, which we located at 5 o'clock in the morning. Dawn was just breaking and the place where we found the break was in the woods. The Germans had during the night thrown a lot of chlorine gas shells into this woods, so we donned our masks. The break in the line was a difficult one to repair. We soon found that we could not do it with our gas masks on—one or the other must take his mask off. We could not return without making the repair. To a soldier there is no such word as fail. It is either do or die. The buddy who was with me was a married man with a baby at home. I, being unmarried, could certainly not ask him to take off his mask, while I kept mine on. So I stripped mine off, made the repair, and while doing so was gassed severely. With the aid of the buddy, I was able to reach our billet. There I was put on a stretcher and taken to a field dressing station. As the old saying goes, it never rains but it pours; gassing was not the only trouble I was destined to experience on that day. As I was being carried to headquarters a shell exploded nearby and I was struck in the leg by a piece of shrapnel. It was a small but painful wound just below the left knee. I tried to accept it with a smile, and I was really glad that I was struck instead of one of the other men, as I was already out of the fight, while if one of them had been wounded, it would have been two out of commission instead of one.

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CHAPTER VIII.

Hospital Experiences.

After being gassed and wounded, I was taken immediately to a dressing station, where the wound in my leg was carefully, but hurriedly dressed and my throat was swabbed with a preparation used in all hospitals to relieve the severe burning in the throat caused by gas. Of all the unpleasant experiences that I had at war, this throat swabbing was the worst. It seemed to me like the surgeon who performed this act had found in my throat a bottomless pit, and as the swab went up and down my burning esophagus, I suffered great agony. Although I knew this treatment was necessary, if I was to recover speedily from the gas burns, I could scarcely endure it. [64]

As soon as the wound in my leg was dressed and my throat doctored, I was examined as to my physical condition by a Major, who labeled me with a tag upon which was written, "tuberculosis." This, of course, was very annoying and caused me considerable worry. It was certainly not a pleasant word for one to receive when lying in the condition that I then was. But I afterwards learned, much to the relief of my mind, that this tag had been put on me by the Major as a warning to the next surgeon into whose hands I should fall, against tuberculosis. In other words, in my condition, it was necessary to take precautions against the white plague.

I experienced great pains in my throat and lungs from the gas and seemed to be choking. My strength was entirely gone, and I was about as miserable as one could be. I could not utter a sound and any attempt to speak only increased my pain. I relate these facts about the agony that I suffered simply to show what a terrible weapon of war this deadly phosgene gas is, and to emphasize the villainy of the Hun government in using it after having agreed with other nations years before not to do so.

I was placed on a cot and made as comfortable as possible under the circumstances and was awaiting a motor truck to take me to a base hospital. On all sides of me were other wounded and gassed boys. Some of them were exceedingly jolly and talkative, notwithstanding their pitiable condition. I remember one boy in particular, who was about my own age. He was going over on a raid and was shot through the temple. The bullet entered on one side an inch or two above the eye, and went straight through, passing out the other side at about the same distance above the eye. It passed through apparently, without striking the brain, and the boy was fully conscious while the wound was dressed and seemed to be quite jolly. I watched the surgeon shave both sides of his head around the wound to prevent infection, and then carefully dress his head, without administering any anesthetic. I marveled at the boy's condition, with such a nasty wound, but what surprised me still more was several months later when I was on board ship on my way home, there was this same boy with his wound entirely healed. Two little white scars, one on each temple, were the only marks that told of his awful experience. [65]

From the dressing station I was taken to a field hospital, about fifteen kilometers to the rear, and there placed in a ward in a tent. The purpose of the field hospital is to treat soldiers who are too severely wounded to be taken to base hospitals. My wound was again examined, cleaned and dressed and again the terrible swab went its depth. About 4 o'clock that afternoon I was loaded into another stretcher on an ambulance and taken to Base Hospital 51 at Toul. The distance from the field hospital to Toul was about twenty-five kilometers and we did not reach there until about 9 o'clock that night. The trip was a rough one, and I suffered greatly. I positively believe my recovery would have been much faster, had I not been transferred so hastily to this hospital. I was placed in a ward in a large hospital built of stone. In this hospital the wounded men were classified in accordance with the nature of their wounds. I was not long in this hospital when a nurse took charge of me, and again, I received that awful swab. Each time it seemed worse than before and how I dreaded the time when it was to be given again! But much to my surprise and pleasure, my treatment was changed at this hospital. My chest and throat were massaged by the nurse with an oil that brought me immediate relief. This nurse continued this treatment several times a day and night and I began to feel a little better. All this time, however, I was unable to utter a word, and I began to wonder whether or not my speech was permanently injured. In my predicament, however, I soon learned the sign language. It is remarkable how well a man can make himself understood merely by the use of his hands. I had no trouble at all in making my wants known. I was in the base hospital at Toul for fourteen days and all of that time I coughed up great chunks of solid matter and mouthfuls of blood, as the result of the burning that I had received. After the seventh day, the nurse stopped the use of the swab, much to my delight, but continued the more appreciated massage. [66]

On the morning of my fifteenth day at this hospital, I was able to make my wants known by a faint whisper, and on that day I was transferred to another hospital. I was placed in a motor car and taken to the railroad station, about half a mile distant and there loaded on to a French hospital train, our destination being Tours. Before the train pulled out of the station, American Red Cross workers, always in evidence in every city in France, came and made us as comfortable as possible. They gave us coffee and doughnuts, hot chocolate and cigarettes, and their kindness was greatly appreciated by all the wounded on that train.

All the members of the crew of the train were French, and there was also several French surgeons aboard. They all showed much interest in the American troops. They asked us many questions about America and the American people. The fighting qualities of our boys were highly praised by them. The members of the crew in particular were interested about working conditions in America, and were anxious to know whether or not they would have any difficulty in getting work if they came to this country. They showed plainly that they had been so favorably impressed by Americans in France that they had a longing to become a part of this great nation. [67]

It took us a day and a night to reach Tours. The journey was a tiresome one and we were glad when the train finally stopped at Tours. Again we were put on motor ambulances and taken to Base Hospital 7, in the suburbs of the city. We were immediately given a physical examination, and all our personal effects, including our clothes, were taken from us, except a few toilet articles. We were then given a bath robe, a towel and soap and taken to a warm shower. It was with great delight that we got under that shower and enjoyed a thorough bath. The showers were of American make and were built large enough so that twenty-five or thirty men could take a bath at a time. After the shower we were given a solution to rub on our bodies for the purpose of killing the cooties. The time had come, I am glad to say, when we and the cooties, must forever part. But the cootie in the front line trenches was not altogether an enemy. That may sound strange, but the fact is, when we were fighting the cooties and chasing them out of our dug-outs, our minds were not on our more serious troubles and we were unmindful of the dangers that surrounded us. So there were times when the cooties were really friends and they kept our minds and hands occupied.

After the bath, we were taken back to the ward and were not allowed to have any clothes for three days. This was probably so there would be no chance of a stray cootie getting into our new outfit. When three days had elapsed, however, we were given slips, which we filled out in accordance with our needs. When I got back into a uniform, life at the hospital was more pleasant. With the aid of crutches I was able to move around a little and to enjoy the company of other boys. The time was spent in playing cards, light conversation, and other amusements. We kept our minds off our rough experiences at the front. [68]

I had an unusually pleasant experience soon after I was at Tours. A Red Cross nurse came to our ward to take orders for our small wants, such as candy, cigarettes, tobacco, writing paper and such articles. She spoke a few words to me and then passed on. It was the first time I had spoken to an American girl since leaving the United States. A few minutes later one of the boys told me she was from the West and then one said he thought she was from California. I could not wait until she came to bring our supplies, but immediately started out to look her up, so anxious was I to see and talk with a Californian. I found her and told her I was from California and that I had heard that she was from that State, too. To my great pleasure and surprise, I learned that she was from Sacramento, my home town, and that she was acquainted with my folks and knew of me. Her name is Miss Mae Forbes, and after her patriotic work in France, she is home again in Sacramento. One must experience the delight of meeting a charming young woman from his own town, in far-off France, and under the circumstances that I did, to appreciate my feelings at this time. It is an experience that I will always remember as one of the most happy of my life. It was only a few days later that I made my way, without the aid of crutches this time, to the American Red Cross station where I again met Miss Forbes and had a long and pleasant chat with her about California. Miss Forbes introduced me to the other members of the station, and from that time until I left Tours, it was like my home. I spent many a pleasant hour there and its memories will always be dear to me.

I was in the hospital at Tours on November 11th, when the armistice was signed. There was a great commotion in my ward when we first learned the news. Most of the boys were glad that the war was over and that the lives of so many boys still at the front had been spared. Others said they hoped the end had not come so suddenly, as they were anxious to recover and get back into the front line to take another crack at the despicable Huns. [69]

At this time I was gaining strength rapidly and was able to get around fairly well. I was given a pass out of the hospital, and with two other boys who were fairly strong, we went into the business district of Tours to witness the celebration. It was like a great city gone mad. The streets were crowded with civilians, and everybody was waving flags. Most people had a French flag in one hand, and the flag of one of the Allied nations in the other. The American flag predominated above all other Allied flags; in fact, the people of Tours seemed to be very partial to America. "Vive l'Amérique" they shouted, "La guerre est fini." They are very emotional and demonstrative. They lined the sidewalks of the business streets, waving their flags and shouting in their native tongue, while an American Marine Band playing patriotic music, marched up one street and down another. It was a general holiday and no business was done that day, and but very little for several days thereafter. All American soldiers in the city were lionized. When a group of enthusiastic Frenchmen would get hold of a buddy, they would insist on taking him to a cafe and buying the most expensive of wines. If we could have conserved all the liquor the French were willing to buy for us that day, dry America would not worry us.

I was seated on a bench in one of the parks watching the demonstration and contrasting it with the probable demonstrations in American cities on that day, when two flags, one French and the other American, dropped over my shoulders. I straightened up and the next thing I knew I was strongly clasped in the arms of a beautiful young French girl, elegantly dressed and bewitchingly charming. She kissed me fervently on each cheek. The sensation was pleasant, but it was rather embarrassing inasmuch as it was in full view of hundreds of people who were celebrating. If the shades of evening had been falling, the spot more secluded and the number reduced to two, it would have been more to my American tastes. However, I arose, conscious that I was blushing, and offered the beauty my hand. She could scarcely speak a word of English and I scarcely a word of French, but we managed to make each other understand that it was a pleasurable greeting. She was soon on her way joyfully waving her flags, and I—well, I charged myself up with a lost opportunity for not being more proficient in the polite use of the French language. [70]

We remained in the city until 9:30 that evening, and the people were still celebrating. And they kept it up for several days and several nights, so great was their joy in knowing that the war was

over and that the enemy had been crushed.

My stay in Tours gave me some opportunity of seeing this ancient city. Tours lies in the heart of the Loire Valley, which is the garden of France. It is 145 miles southwest of Paris by rail and is on the left bank of the Loire River. It is an exceedingly old city and has an interesting history. There are numerous castles and chateaux in the vicinity, which in peace times are visited annually by thousands of tourists. It contains a number of ancient buildings of interest. In normal times it is no doubt one of the most interesting cities in France.

The hospital in which I was treated was a very large one, in fact, it was a great institution of many buildings. It contained forty-five wards of fifty cots each. It covered a large area and had every comfort for the men, such as a motion picture house, library, reading room, etc.

After I had been there about five weeks and had regained much of my physical strength, the authorities in charge began to classify the boys, either for further duty, or for shipment home. All were anxious to be put in class D, which meant the United States—God's country. Nobody wanted class A, which meant further duty with the army of occupation, and another year at least in Europe. It seemed very much like a lottery, as the boys who were able to do so, walked up and received their classification. I was exceedingly happy when I was given class D, which meant that nothing would stop me from seeing "home and mother."

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After being classified, we were notified to make ourselves ready for a trip to the coast. Although we were not told that we were going home, we knew that the good old U. S. A. was our ultimate destination. So I received a pass and made my last visit to the business district of Tours for the purpose of purchasing some souvenirs of France for the women folks at home. The men I had already remembered with rings, made during my convalescing days at the hospital out of French two-franc pieces. I might add that ring making was a favorite occupation of the patients and we spent many pleasant moments working them out sitting on our cots, while a group of interested buddies would sit around and watch and comment.

I found it no easy matter to make my purchases. In the first place, the French merchants, knowing that many of the American boys had money to spend, asked about four prices for everything, and, secondly, the French methods of doing business are quite different from our own. But by spending practically the entire day, by attempting Hebraic methods in purchasing, and by pretending that I had only a few francs to spend, I managed to spend about \$25 in buying the few things that I wanted to bring home.

I was then ready to leave, whenever Uncle Sam was willing to take me.

CHAPTER IX.

Home Again

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ToC

On the morning of December 11th a number of the boys at the hospital at Tours received orders to prepare for a trip to the coast. This was the most welcome news that we could have heard and we hastily got our personal belongings together. It was about 10 o'clock when we were placed in ambulances and taken from the hospital. We were driven to the railroad station about a mile distant, and there assigned to quarters in an American hospital train.

This was the first American train I had been on since I arrived in France, and it certainly was a great relief to me to know that we were not to be crowded into one of those uncomfortable, stuffy and tiresome French trains. The American hospital train furnished an excellent example of American efficiency, and when contrasted with the French trains. I could not but think how much more progressive our people are than Europeans. We had everything that we needed, and plenty of it. We enjoyed good beds, good food, and sufficient room to move around without encroaching upon the rights and the good natures of others. We pulled out of Tours with no regrets on what was our most enjoyable train trip while in France. It was enjoyable for two reasons—first, we were traveling in comfort and as an American is used to traveling, and secondly, we were traveling toward home.

The trip down the Loire Valley followed practically the same route that we took on our way from Brest to Tours. The scenes, of course, were very much the same, except that the country now wore its winter coat, while it was mid-summer on my previous trip.

We arrived in Brest on December 13th, and to our surprise, we learned that President Wilson had just previously landed there, and the city had gone wild with enthusiasm over him. A tremendous crowd gathered at the station to greet him. Bands were playing and the occasion was a gala one. Our train stopped about a quarter of a mile away from the station, where the President greeted a mass of French people and American soldiers. I regret very much that I was

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unable to get a view of the President while he was at Brest; that was not my fortune. We did, however, see his train pull out on its journey to Paris.

Soon after we arrived at Brest we were told that we would be taken back on the "George Washington," the liner upon which President Wilson crossed the Atlantic, and great was our joy. However, we were soon doomed to disappointment, for orders were changed, and we were taken to the Carry On Hospital, just out of Brest. The ride to the hospital was a disagreeable one, as it had been raining and the streets were muddy and wet. The ambulance rocked more like a boat than a motor car. We were assigned quarters and given food. We met a number of boys in the various wards who were awaiting their time of departure. We asked them about how long it was after arriving at Brest before soldiers were embarked for home, and they said the time varied all the way from three to thirty days. That was not very encouraging and we were hoping that in our case it would be three days. The very next morning, however, a number of our boys received orders to get ready to depart. I was not included among them, to my sorrow, and had no idea how long I might be kept at Brest. It was only a day or two later when we were made happy by the news that our time to depart had come. It was joyful news and made our hearts beat with the joy that only a returning soldier knows.

We were loaded on the hospital ship "La France," which is a beautiful, four-funnel French liner, 796 feet in length. It was the third largest liner in use in transporting troops at that time. We took our places on the boat about noon, but the big ship laid in the harbor all afternoon, and it was not until about sundown that she started to pull out and we bade "good-bye" to "la belle France." One might think that there was a lot of cheering when the boat pulled out on the eventful afternoon of December 17, 1918, but there was not. Some of the boys, it is true, cheered heartily. Most of us, however, were too full of emotion to become wildly demonstrative. Our thoughts were on home, the folks that are dear to us, and our beloved native land, and our emotions were too strained for expression in cheers.

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The vessel was manned by French, who treated us splendidly for the first two days out. After that, however, they began to skimp on our food and to give us things of poor quality. For instance, we were given coffee without sugar or milk, cereals of poor quality without even salt in them, and no fruit, though it was understood that fruit was to be a part of our diet. The boys complained bitterly at this treatment, and finally our officers, knowing that we were not being properly fed, made an examination of the ship. They found several hundred boxes of apples that were supposed to be for us, stowed away in the hold. It had been the intention of the French in charge of this boat to steal that fruit, evidently to sell it, at the expense of the wounded American soldiers on this hospital ship, who had fought and saved their country from the Hunnish hordes. We had been cheated and overcharged for everything we purchased in France, and we knew it, but it surely did hurt when we were thus treated by men whose homes we had saved at the cost of our blood. I will say this: We did not hold this kind of treatment against the French people as a whole, but to individuals who are so unprincipled and so greedy that they are willing to sacrifice the fair name of their people for a paltry gain. I might add here that it was the smallness of some of the individual "Y" workers that brought the Y. M. C. A. into such disrepute among the American soldiers in France. This simply shows how important it is for an individual to sustain the reputation of his country, or his association, as the case may be, by honorable conduct.

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After our officers uncached the horde of stolen apples in the ship's hold, we were well fed and on the last two days of the journey had no complaint to make on this score.

On December 24th at 10 a.m. some far sighted individual shouted "Land" and what a welcome word it was. Columbus, watching from the deck of the Santa Maria, was not more happy when he first set eyes upon the faint outline of the new world than we were as the dim blue shoreline began to rise upon the horizon. There was a mad rush to the deck and everybody who could get out was soon watching over the rail. It was not long before the Statue of Liberty came into full view and there was joy in our hearts for we knew that at last we were home.

In a very few minutes our ship stopped and a pilot was taken aboard to guide the great vessel safely into the harbor. Next we were greeted by a yacht that steamed out beside us carrying a great sign, "Welcome Home." It was the 24th of December, and this boat carried a large Christmas tree, typical of the season.

As we entered the harbor, we were given a wonderful welcome. It seemed as though every whistle in the great city of New York had been brought into action to make noise on our account. Certainly every boat in the harbor from the smallest tug to the trans-Atlantic liners was blowing a blast; and the noise, though of an entirely different character, was as deafening as that of a battle. Every window of all the great buildings that make up that wonderful skyline of New York was filled with patriotic citizens waving a welcome to us. It was a great sight and one that the boys will never forget. It seemed so good to see our own people again—our pretty girls, our fond fathers, our dear mothers, our elderly folks, and even our street gamins. It gave us a feeling that we would like to take them all in our arms, for they were ours and we were theirs. I knew, of course, that there would be none of my folks to meet me, as my home is in California, but it did me good to see the other boys meet and greet their mothers, fathers, sisters and sweethearts.

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We started disembarking at 2 o'clock in the afternoon. I was on the top deck and did not get off until 9 o'clock, being among the last to leave the ship. We were taken on a ferry to Jersey City, where we were entertained and given food. Later in the evening we were taken to Camp Merritt, New Jersey, by train. It did seem good to ride on a real American train, on American soil, and among our countrymen. We arrived at Camp Merritt at 11 o'clock at night and I was taken to the hospital. I was assigned to a ward and after getting comfortably fixed was given a real American

meal, and you may be sure that it was thoroughly enjoyable. We had to stay in the barracks the next day to undergo a physical examination and for the further purpose of taking precautions against the persistent cooties—some of the boys having encountered them on the boat.

The spirit of Christmas was everywhere manifest, and certainly I could have had no Christmas present better than to arrive in America on Christmas eve. The Red Cross brought us boxes of good things to eat and Christmas presents, and the people entertained us wonderfully. They took us on automobile rides in their private cars, to dinners, to theaters, etc. Their hospitality was of the real American sort and it was deeply appreciated by the boys.

At the very first opportunity after reaching camp, I sent a telegram to my parents in Sacramento, telling them that I had arrived safely. I received an answer saying that all at home were well, that same day, and it was a welcome message. It was the first word I had heard from home since I had been gassed and wounded in October. I had been transferred from place to place so frequently that my mail never quite caught up with me. It kept following me around, and I did not get all my letters until some weeks after I arrived home.

I was in Camp Merritt for a month and five days, and during that time I had an excellent opportunity of seeing New York. I made several trips to the metropolis and enjoyed seeing the points of interest of that great city.

While at the camp I met Harry Nauman, a Sacramento boy, and greatly enjoyed the pleasure of his company. From my folks I heard that James Brenton, my room mate at college, was also there. I looked him up and was fortunate in finding him. We spent three or four pleasant days together before we departed for California.

On the first day of February, I left the camp and was sent to the Letterman Hospital in San Francisco. The trip across the continent was uneventful, except for the last one hundred miles of the journey. At Sacramento I again saw my folks after a year in the service and my father and mother accompanied me to San Francisco, making the ride most enjoyable as Dad related all the local happenings during the long time that I was away. I spent several days in the Letterman Hospital and was then honorably discharged from the service.

I have endeavored to relate in a general way many of my experiences. I have not told all. Some of the more gruesome occurrences I have left untold, not believing that any good would come of their repetition.

I can honestly say that I am glad that I went to war and that I fought for my country. The experience was of untold value to me, as it gave me a broader and more serious view of life. Notwithstanding all the horrors of war, if called upon again, I would willingly go. I am ready to serve my country any time it calls. We have a wonderful country and a wonderful people. I realize that now more than I did before we went to war. My rather limited observations lead me to believe that we are far ahead of any European country. If Americans live for America, if they put country above self, if they obey the laws and become acquainted with all the wonders of their own land, this nation will make even greater progress in the future than it has in the past. The war brought out a wonderful spirit; let our spirit in times of peace be just as patriotic.

Typographical errors corrected in text:

Page 2: dispicable replaced with despicable
Page 16: manoevuers replaced with manoeuvres
Page 16: Madamoiselle replaced with Mademoiselle
Page 58: greusome replaced with gruesome

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK IN THE FLASH RANGING SERVICE ***

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