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'Y' Man

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FORD CAMIONETTE DRIVEN BY W. B. WEST

[ToList](#)

The Fight for the Argonne

Personal Experiences of a "Y" Man

WILLIAM BENJAMIN WEST

WITH AN INTRODUCTION
BY
BURGES JOHNSON



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WILLIAM BENJAMIN WEST

TO THE BOYS OF THE 37TH DIVISION A.E.F.
WITH WHOM I WAS PRIVILEGED TO
SERVE ON THE ALSATIAN BORDER
AND IN THE ARGONNE

**FIGHTING UNITS OF THE
37TH DIVISION**

GUARD ARMY (OHIO)

**AND THEIR COMMANDING
PERSONNEL ON SEPT. 5th, 1918**

37TH DIVISION

MAJOR GENERAL C.S. FARNSWORTH
Commanding.

LIEUT. COLONEL DANA T. MERRILL
Chief of Staff.

MAJOR EDWARD W. WILDRICK
Adjutant General.

73RD BRIGADE OF INFANTRY

BRIG. GENERAL C.F. ZIMMERMAN
Commanding.

145th Regiment

COL. SANFORD B. STANBERRY.

146th Regiment

COL. C.C. WEYBRECHT.

135th Machine Gun Battalion

MAJOR CHARLES C. CHAMBERS.

74TH BRIGADE OF INFANTRY

BRIG. GENERAL W.P. JACKSON
Commanding.

147th Regiment

COL. F.W. GALBRAITH, JR.

148th Regiment

COL. GEORGE H. WOOD.

136th Machine Gun Battalion
MAJOR JOHN A. LOGAN.

62ND BRIGADE OF FIELD ARTILLERY

Commanding officer not announced
134th Regiment
COL. HAROLD M. BRUSH.
135th Regiment
COL. DUDLEY M. HARD.
136th Regiment
COL. PAUL L. MITCHELL.
112th Trench Mortar Battery
CAPTAIN A.S. DILLON.

ENGINEER TROOPS

112th Regiment
COL. JOHN R. McQUIGG.

SIGNAL TROOPS

112th Field Signal Battalion
MAJOR RUSSELL L. MUNDHENK.

DIVISION UNITS

37th Division Headquarters Troop
CAPTAIN FRANK F. FREBIS.
134th Machine Gun Battalion
MAJOR WADE C. CHRISTY.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	11
I. FIVE WEEKS IN A FLIVVER	15
II. ON THE MOVE	42
III. OUR INVINCIBLES	54
IV. HOLDING THE LINE	71
V. TANKS AND TRACTORS	83
VI. PEN PICTURES	91
VII. MORAL FLASHES	112

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

FORD CAMIONETTE DRIVEN BY W. B. WEST

Frontispiece

Facing page

GERMAN AERIAL BOMB (SMALL)

24

GERMAN AERIAL BOMB (LARGE)	48
MEMORY SKETCH OF A SECTOR OF THE BATTLEFIELD, 1918	54
FRENCH OFFICER—GERMAN OFFICER	64
GERMAN WEAPONS	94
VARIETIES OF SHELLS AND BOMBS (PHOTOGRAPHED AT NANCY)	120

[11]

INTRODUCTION

ToC

It was on the road from Neufchateau to La Foche, where Base Hospital 117 was located, that I first became acquainted with the author of this book. He evidently knew how to run a Ford camionette, even though it was not in just the shape in which it left the factory. I remember that I asked him what he did for a living back in the States—those service uniforms were great levelers—and he said he was a parson. "But now you are a chauffeur," I objected. "Well, you see," he said, "when I first came over they asked me to fill out blanks indicating what I could do, and in that statement I admitted that I could run a car. I also said I could preach. They tried me out as a chauffeur and liked my work so well that they said they would stand pat on that; they had never heard me preach."

[12]

As a matter of fact, I heard Mr. West preach that morning to the boys suffering from war neurosis, or "shell shock," in Hospital 117. He had helped them out on former Sundays there, and they sent for him again and again.

Later, when I was in the Baccarat sector, I met a most interesting and effective man who was in the Supply Department of the "Y" on week days, and conducted services in outlying camps every Sunday morning with great success. He had been a circus acrobat back in the States. What a revolutionizing influence war is, with preachers chauffeuring and acrobats preaching! The important point was that they were all serving whole-heartedly in whatever way they could.

It was in Baccarat that I met West again, running his car, transporting newspapers or moving-picture machines, or canteen supplies, or itinerant entertainers such as I, out over any sort of road toward the front line. His glimpses of the great war were from an angle of vision that makes what he has to say in this book well worth reading. His duties took him into every sort of billet, and brought him into close touch with many branches of the army, as well as with all sorts of welfare work and workers. I find that he refers, in passing, to that dramatic moment when we stood on a hilltop and watched the bombing of Baccarat just below us, while the Boche machine passed very close overhead. He does not say that he hid behind one tree and I hid behind another, trying to keep the trunks between us and the flying shrapnel. Nor does he say that he picked up and carried home a fragment which landed between us in the road, although it came just as near to me as it did to him!

[13]

This started out to be an introduction to a book. It is really a personal expression of good will toward one whom I was glad to meet and touch for a moment in that strange whirlpool of human activity last summer in France.

[14]

BURGES JOHNSON.

Vassar College,
March 3, 1919.

[15]

CHAPTER I

FIVE WEEKS IN A FLIVVER

"Halt!"

When above the noise and rattle of the car—for a Ford always carries a rattle—you hear the stentorian command of the guard, *instantly* every stopping device is automatically applied.

"Who Goes There?"

"A friend with the countersign."

"Advance! and give the countersign."

The guard at charge, with bayonet fixed, awaits your coming. When you get within a few feet of the point of his bayonet the guard again commands, "*Halt!*" In the silence and blackness of the night you whisper the password and if he is satisfied that you are indeed a friend he says, "Pass, friend." If he is not satisfied you are detained until your identity has been established.

No matter how many hundreds of times you hear the challenge ring out, each time you hear it a new thrill runs through your whole being and a new respect for military authority holds you captive, for you instinctively know that behind that challenge is the cold steel and a deadly missile. [16]

It was a splendidly camouflaged camionette that I inherited from Hughes when I went to Baccarat on the Alsatian border. In all my dangerous trips, by night and day, it never failed, and I think back to it now with a tenderness bordering on affection.

My first day on the job I was sent out to five huts with supplies, driving my own car and piloting the men who were sent out to pilot me. Although they had been over the roads and were supposed to know the way, they did not have a good *sense* of direction and so were easily lost.

The headquarters of the 37th Division were at Baccarat on the Alsatian border. Strasburg lay fifty miles to the east and Metz fifty-five miles to the northwest. To hold this front, an area fifteen to twenty miles long, was the task of the Ohio boys until they were relieved by the French the middle of September and sent into the Argonne Forest. [17]

Over this area were scattered twenty-one Y.M.C.A. huts. The Headquarters hut was at Baccarat, which was farthest from the front line—about ten miles back as the crow flies. The other huts were scattered over the area at points most advantageous for serving the boys and up to within a few hundred yards of the line. We had thirty-four men and ten women secretaries. Our farthest advanced woman worker had a hut all her own at Hablainville, a village where our troops were billeted and where Fritzke kept everyone on the *qui vive* by his intermittent gifts of high-explosive bombs and shells.

Miss O'Connor always inspired confidence. It mattered not whether she was dealing with the hysterical French women when bombs exploded in their gardens and fields, or whether she was counseling with the Colonel, at whose table she was the invited guest. Her quiet assurance, her cordial greeting, her intelligent understanding, and her keen sally of wit made her always welcome. And the boys thronged her hut. She did not try to "mother" them—the mistake some canteen workers made. Nor did she try to "make an impression" upon them. She quietly lived her life among them. No one could long be boisterous where she was, and so I always found her hut a rendezvous where men were glad to resort as they came from the battle or from camp. [18]

Many were absorbed in their reading, of which there was a good assortment—the daily papers, the magazines and a choice collection of books furnished by the American Library Association. Other groups were intent upon chess or checkers, while in the piano corner were the musically inclined. Sometimes it was a piano or a baritone solo, but most often the boys were singing "Keep the Home Fires Burning," "The Long, Long Trail," or "Katy." [19]

One day when delivering to the hut at Neufchateau, I was attracted by the strains of music that came from the piano in the auditorium—the "Y" there had a large double hut. I slipped into a back seat to listen. A group of boys were around the piano while others were scattered through the building attracted as I had been. At the old French piano was a small khaki-clad figure, coaxing from its keys with wizard fingers such strains as we had not dreamed were possible. We were held spellbound until the musician, having finished, quietly walked away, leaving his auditors suspended somewhere between earth and heaven. One by one we walked silently out to our respective duties of helping to make the world safe for such as he.

One Sunday evening just at dusk, I drove to our camp at Ker Avor. The boys called this camp their summer home. It surely was an ideal spot in the heart of a pine forest, high up in the Vosges Mountains. It was also near enough to the enemy lines—about a mile distant—to make it mighty interesting. [20]

After delivering our supplies to the hut we went out to where a gang of soldiers who were off duty had gathered in the forest. One was playing a harmonica and another was "jigging" and telling funny stories. Instantly and gladly they swung the gathering into a religious service, with songs from the "Y" hymn book and a fine snappy address as a speaker stood on a hummock surrounded by the silent, thoughtful bunch. The sky was our canopy and with the moonlight filtering through the branches of the pines, an indelible impression was registered on every fellow there.

The boys were happy to have us come and showed us about their camp, including an ingenious little chapel which had been built by the Germans during their occupancy of this territory in the early part of the War. [21]

My first near view of the Boche trenches came one day when, waiting for our movie man at one

of the huts, I went out "masked and helmeted" to a hill between our first and second lines. The peculiar "chills" and "thrills" of first sensations are indescribable. Cautiously and with some inward trembling I followed Private Van Voliet, of the 146th Infantry (Colonel Weybrecht's Regiment), across a shell-torn field where twisted wire entanglements told of former fierce encounters. We passed a Stokes mortar battery of the 147th Infantry concealed in low bushes. The boys, lying idly in their dog-tents, wove canes from willow branches wound with wire and capped with bullets. I was presented with a cane by Private Boothby and a swagger stick by Private Rhoades. [22]

A five minute walk brought us to the "alert zone," where gas masks must be adjusted and ready for instant use. The guard at the crossroad allowed us to pass with the warning, "Keep under cover or you will draw the fire of the Boche snipers." So we crawled through a hole in the camouflaged screen which protected the road from German observers, and keeping behind clumps of bushes we peered through at the trenches just across the valley, in which Hun rifles lay cocked and primed for any American who would dare become a target. I confess I breathed easier when we got safely back to the "Y" hut.

NIGHT BOMBING

For four nights in succession Boche planes had been trying to drop bombs on the rail-head where troop trains were being loaded near our Headquarters. On the fourth night, when returning from a front line hut with Secretary Johnson, who in America was a professor in Vassar College, we stopped on a high ridge overlooking the battle line. This was a favorite rendezvous on my return from night deliveries, as it gave a wonderful panoramic view of the whole front line for miles in either direction. The flashes of the guns, the dazzling brilliancy of the star shells, the long lines of varicolored signals as they went up from many camps and out-posts, and the flares dropped from scores of planes, passing and repassing in the darkness overhead, can never be forgotten. It was a nightly and wonderful Fourth of July celebration, enhanced by the weirdness and danger of actual warfare. [23]

As we stood this night, silhouetted against the moonlit sky, wearing our "tin" hats and with gas masks at "alert," suddenly out of the night loomed a German plane, flying low, the Boche engine distinguished by its own peculiar throb. As it passed over our heads it dropped a red flare and proceeded toward Baccarat. Evidently, it had discovered our signals for that night and was using them. As soon as its deception was discovered our gunners opened fire, but not until it had dropped four bombs on the town and gotten away in safety toward the German lines. The explosions from the bombs were terrific and the flashes lit up the whole sky. We took refuge behind trees as shrapnel from our anti-aircraft guns rattled down in the roadway and the "ping" of machine-gun bullets startled our ears. [24]

When we returned to town we found everything in confusion. One bomb had exploded in the treetops a half block from our billet and had wrecked the beautiful mansion of the French mayor of the town. It also wounded some American soldiers in a nearby barracks. Another bomb landed between two buildings at Hexo Barracks, killing three of our boys and one French poilu, besides wounding many and shattering the buildings. Four horses were killed by pieces of shrapnel, and when looking over the scene of destruction the next morning I noticed a hole, clean cut, through a half-inch steel tire on a nearby cart. It had been cut by a piece of shrapnel about an inch long which had also gone through spokes and hub and buried itself in the ground. [25]



GERMAN AERIAL BOMB
(Small)

ToList

At four o'clock one day, after the regular round of hut deliveries, a special order was handed me from our chief for immediate execution. In ten minutes I was off in my ever-faithful flivver. My order took me to Reherrey, a village near the line, where a special pass was secured from the commanding officer, allowing me to go over a dangerous road exposed to the German guns. From the Y.M.C.A. Hut at Reherrey, I took with me a new secretary, a Congregational minister from the Middle West, to relieve McGuffy, the secretary at St. Pole, whom I was to bring back to headquarters.

[26]

When we reached the hut at St. Pole, the secretaries, including McGuffy, were out at the front with supplies for the boys. While waiting for them to return we strolled about through the desolate remnants of this old peasant village. My companion had not been under fire before, so when the first shell from the Boche "heavies" came whistling and whining toward us he hastened to the dugout saying, "This is no place for me." He was ashamed of his own fear and proved that he was a "regular guy" by joining in the laugh and jibes of the fellows. Being reassured by the passing of several shells safely overhead, he rejoined me in our tramp through the village. Every portable thing of value had been carried off by the Huns and what was left had been destroyed. Stoves had been broken down and beds and furniture demolished.

When McGuffy got back we started for Baccarat. It was a stormy night, black as ink, and we had to go over roads which the bombardment of the early evening had torn up. It took two hours to go eight miles. When we arrived we found an anxious group of "Y" workers discussing the probability of our having been blown to pieces or captured by the Boche, and they were just about to send out a searching party.

[27]

No soldiers ever had anything on the boys from the Buckeye State. They had been sent to the Alsatian border to hold the line against a threatening foe. Persistent rumors told of a German drive on this sector. Nothing but our men and guns and a few hastily constructed wire entanglements stood in their way. And the German army had a name for sweeping right through such open country and taking what it wanted. But many things caused Fritz to stop and think. The German raiding parties were failures. Only two out of a score succeeded in getting the Americans. That meant that the Yankee out-posts were not only on the job but also that they were absolutely fearless and able to capture single-handed superior numbers of the enemy.

[28]

Then, one night just as the Germans seemed to be concentrating on a dangerous salient, eighty of our big guns in a couple of hours coughed up twelve hundred tons of gas and spit it in the faces of an enemy that dared to think it could fool with Uncle Sam's boys from Ohio. For two days after, the Boche were carrying their dead out of that area.

No more threats of a German drive were heard in that sector, but reports came frequently of Boche prisoners and deserters who offered to surrender whole companies of Huns if they could

only be guaranteed that the Americans would spare their lives.

Major H, a friend of old college days, was a staff officer of the 37th Division and was as brave as he was big. His clear brain and military genius laid out our machine-gun nests. He had studied carefully every foot of ground and planted machine guns wherever they could command an enemy advance or night raid. The direct and crossfire of these guns were so coordinated that many guns could play upon a dangerous enemy approach. It was a most exciting chess game which was being played with real armies and men. [29]

The Petty Post was the strategic point of our army out in No Man's Land, and signals from the post would give warning of any sudden move of the enemy. Its location was changed from time to time.

On August 27, at 7:30 P.M., we left headquarters in the official car. Two chauffeurs who knew every shell-hole in the roads and who could feel their way in the darkness were in the front seat. Major Hazlett and another major who was inspecting trench conditions and personal equipment were on either side of me in the back seat. The powerful motor "purring" quietly waited Major Hazlett's "We're off." Quickly the eight kilometers to the field headquarters of Colonel Galbraith, 147th Regiment, were covered. After cordial greetings the Major was closeted in secret conference with the Colonel. In a half hour we were off again. Major Hazlett alone knew his objective. That night it was the sector near Heberviller. The captain's headquarters was a little frame shack eight by ten feet, carefully guarded in the heart of a dense woods. The sentry at the door demanded the password. In the weird candlelight were the captain and four aides. We sat on empty boxes and the edge of a table. Runners coming in out of the blackness of the forest stood at attention while they communicated their secret information and awaited further orders. Here investigations were made and all the latest "dope" on possible enemy action was obtained. [30]

It was gratifying to note the solicitude of the officers for the comfort of the men. It was early fall and the nights were cool. [31]

"Captain," said the Major, "how are your men dressed?"

"There is no complaint, sir."

"Do they still have their summer underwear?"

"Yes, sir."

"It is getting too cold for that. I will see that a new issue is granted."

All stood to salute as we took our departure. When again on our way the conversation of the back seat showed that the interest of these officers in their men was genuine. For example:

"Harry, those boys do not have any overcoats. Nothing but raincoats for these cold nights. Whose fault is that? Can't you get some action?"

"They must have them immediately. I will so report to the Issue Department." [32]

Many times our car came to a sudden stop as a stentorian "Halt!" pierced the darkness and our second chauffeur went forward to give the countersign. One weak-voiced guard failed to make himself heard until our car was almost past. Major Hazlett was instantly aroused:

"What is the matter with your voice?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Then shout it out. If this happens again I'll have you court-martialed."

"Yes, sir!" And with a salute we proceeded.

Our last mile with the car was over shell-torn roads and past guards who dared to pass no man without full proof of his identity. Many German spies had been caught recently. Through the ruined village of Heberviller we passed to the old chateau. Here we left the car with the chauffeurs, and having been armed we started with two guides for the trenches. Every gun emplacement was inspected to see if orders had been faithfully carried out—and woe betide the man who failed. The Major's intimate and technical knowledge of every detail in machine-gun fighting, won the admiration of the men. [33]

For three hours we walked "duck-boards"^[1] through a maze of connecting trenches, stealthily and silently following our guides and stopping "dead" when a star shell burst near us. We had secret hopes of taking prisoner some of the "Heinies" whom we could almost hear breathing out there in No Man's Land.

As we talked with the men in Petty Post No. 10, the German 77's were feeling for some vulnerable point just back of our line. We could see the flash of the gun and hear that peculiar, fascinating "whine" as it passed over our heads, and finally its mocking challenge as it found its target. One of the men who was off guard, lay curled up in a shell hole beside the trench, sleeping peacefully to the music of the guns. Conversation here was whispered, and even the illuminated faces of our wrist watches were carefully concealed in our pockets. And every man knew well the reason why. [34]

The sergeant in charge had a "hunch" that Fritz was coming over at a certain hour of the early morning. We knew that "dope" coming from enemy sources is often misleading and decided not to wait for the "party." The next day we learned that the "party" was not "pulled off," and our return to camp gave us a few hours of perfectly good and needed sleep.

AN AIR BATTLE

Boche planes overhead were so common as to excite little interest, but when in the midst of a heavy anti-aircraft barrage, the French children playing outside our garage excitedly announced "Trois Boche avions," we left off "tuning up" our engines and went out to watch them—three specks high overhead and out of range of our guns. Suddenly, from somewhere in the sky above, two Allied planes shot toward the German "birds," and a battle ensued which we could clearly see, although they were too high for us to hear the sound of their machine guns. [35]

With terrific burst of speed one of our planes shot toward one of the German planes and seemed almost to ride on top of it, all the while pouring into it a stream of machine gun bullets, the smoke of which we could see. When they separated, ours rose but the German shot downward, evidently out of control, and we held our breath in anxious joy as we watched him drop two thousand feet or more. Then as he came through a cloud and was hidden from the view of our planes, he suddenly righted and shot off toward the German lines. [36]

The next day the same thrilling scene was staged a little to the south of us. But this time there was no disappointment. The rapid "pu-pu-pu-pu-pu" of the machine gun told us that our pilot's gun was working perfectly, and a burst of flame from the enemy plane told also how true was his aim.

There can be no more thrilling moments in life than when you are watching bodies out of control hurtling through space and are breathlessly anticipating the crash. Your heart suspends operation, even for an enemy. Hun though he was, he was still a hero of the air, and chivalry prompted a decent burial on the banks of the beautiful Meurthe. The wrecked plane furnished souvenirs for the many who saw it fall.

HAND GRENADES

The hand grenade is a mighty dangerous weapon, but also a most effective one when wisely used. [37]

At Merviller I was delivering a load of supplies to the Y.M.C.A. hut. A quarter of a mile to my right a deafening explosion was accompanied by a mass of debris thrown high in the air. "A German bomb!" was the first thought. And we waited expectantly to see where the next one would strike. When there was no second, I drove around to investigate. On a side street I found a crowd of soldiers and French civilians already gathering. The Red Cross ambulance had "beat me to it," and the surgeons were already working over the mangled bodies of four American soldiers. The street was littered and unexploded hand grenades lay everywhere. Two soldiers had been carrying gunny sacks filled with grenades when one accidentally exploded, it in turn exploding others until the wreckage was complete. A military investigation would report the cause of the accident and the damage wrought, and thus an incident of war would quickly become history. [38]

THROUGH A GERMAN BARRAGE

On my last Sunday with the flivver I drove with Secretary Armstrong to our hut at Pettonville. In the forenoon we helped Secretary Reisner in the canteen. Then we closed, ate a lunch, and, loaded down with cakes, raisins, cigarettes, and tobacco, started for the trenches. As we neared the front line the Germans began shelling the woods toward which we were headed. While we did some lightning calculating, we never slackened our pace but went through to the battalion headquarters. There a sniper volunteered as guide to the trenches. We passed several company headquarters and gave out our supplies to the men as they stood in the line with their mess kits.

When we left the first-line trenches we walked or crouched through woods, where the bark of the trees toward the enemy was riddled and broken by bullets, shrapnel, and shell; then through trenches which had been abandoned but which ran far out into No Man's Land and furnished splendid avenues to our Petty Posts. No. 4 was the first, and was so exposed that only one man at a time was permitted with the guide. Secretary Armstrong went first. While we were examining the graves of German aviators who had been killed when their planes crashed to earth, a rifle bullet whistled over our heads. We had been seen by a German sniper, so we quickly crouched low behind the trench wall. I found myself right over the grave of one of the Germans, and was rewarded by finding on it a piece of German shell, grim paradox of the fortunes of war. [39]

We continued through the trenches to P.P. No. 5. This was our nearest point in this sector to the enemy front line. It was difficult to get through because of the mud and water in the trench. In some places, because of exposure to the enemy guns, we had to crawl on our hands and knees. At the post were eight men, two at the observation post and the rest in a dugout nearby. The men at the P.P.'s are on guard forty-eight hours, and off twenty-four hours. After ten days they are relieved and go back for ten days' rest. [40]

This special post was raided four times during that week. One report said three hundred Germans came over but the men at the post said about sixty. One attack was a surprise and they got four of our men. The other times the Germans were routed with varying losses. The P.P.'s are only observation posts and are not intended to be held in case of raid, but usually our boys were eager to give Fritz all that was coming to him, and they seldom failed no matter how largely

outnumbered.

There were no signs of fear among our splendid fellows, and while it required courage to be a mile or more beyond the supporting line, lying out in No Man's Land, yet the very danger and the adventure of it made a mighty appeal to the full-blooded Yank, and there was never a lack of volunteers.

[41]

FOOTNOTES:

- [1] Duck-boards are sections of boardwalk laid in the bottom of the trenches to keep the soldiers up out of the mud. These sections are about ten feet long and two wide, and made by nailing cross pieces to two scantling.

[42]

CHAPTER II

ON THE MOVE

ToC

"Over there" excitement was the normal condition, and the real soldier was never satisfied unless he was in the thick of the fight. Even "holding the line" on the Alsatian border was tame, and the news of Chateau-Thierry made the Ohio boys "green with envy." Their more fortunate guard comrades of the 26th and 42nd Divisions had covered themselves with glory. Where would the next American blow be struck?

"Anything doing up at the front?" was the first question shot at every dispatch rider or truck driver who came "along the pike" from the north. "The whole d— country is full of Yanks!" "Ten divisions packed in between Toul and Nancy." "Never saw so much ammunition in my life." "Couldn't get through for the traffic." Such reports kept the boys of the 37th on tiptoe of expectation. Would they get a chance for the "big push"?

[43]

Imagine, therefore, the peculiar thrill of every man when about September 11, it was announced officially that the division was to be ready for an immediate move. The boys were to be "stripped" for action. Every unnecessary thing was thrown into the salvage pile. Military trains were placed on the sidings in the railway yards at Baccarat to be loaded with men, horses, and equipment. These trains to move off on schedule time, about two hours apart, until the last had taken its departure.

For two nights steady streams of French troops, ammunition wagons, guns, and army trucks had poured into Baccarat on their way to relieve the various units of the Ohio Division. Four horses, two abreast, would be hitched to an artillery wagon on which was mounted a camouflaged '75 (three-inch gun). The heavy guns were drawn by six or eight horses, two abreast, with a rider for every two horses.

[44]

The Y.M.C.A. headquarters were on the corner where the two main streets of the town crossed. One night about ten o'clock we stood on the curb watching two lines of men and wagons, one from the south and one from the west, as they came together at this corner and flowed on through the town. It was a fascinating and weird night scene. Suddenly we heard a Boche plane. When it passed overhead it dropped a star shell which lighted up that whole section of the town and revealed the long lines of French infantry and artillery. The burned out shell dropped just across the street from us. Evidently, German spies had given notice of the movements of troops and scouting planes had come over to get information and take pictures. These were closely followed by bombing planes which tried to destroy the bridge over the Meurthe and thus hinder the movement of troops, but their bombs went wide of their mark and our anti-aircraft guns made it so hot for them that they could not get near enough to do any material damage.

[45]

Many Chinese troops in French uniforms passed through Baccarat the next day. With military precision our boys, relieved by these French and Chinese troops, poured into the town and were quickly loaded on the troop trains.

Three days before the move a secret order had come to the chief of our "Y" division to be ready to move with the troops. Immediately all our secretaries were notified to close their huts and prepare their stock for removal. "Y" trucks were dispatched to bring the secretaries and all stock on hand in to the central warehouse. Where the hut was a tent—and four of the seventeen huts were canvas—our expert, who had traveled for years with Barnum & Bailey, went with the trucks and brought in tent and all.

[46]

The army, desiring to have the "Y" supplies and men at the front with the boys, put one or two cars on each train at our disposal. For twenty-four hours without let up the "Y" trucks, manned by a score or more of secretaries, rushed boxes of chocolate, cakes, raisins, cocoa, cigarettes, tobacco, matches, and other supplies essential to the comfort of the boys, from the warehouse to the trains.

It was an exciting game to have each car loaded when the signal to move was given. Sometimes it was a close shave, as, for instance, when our car on one train having been loaded we were offered a second car which was accepted. We worked feverishly to get it ready for the move. It was half filled—only ten minutes remained before the train was to leave. Our big French truck was being loaded at the warehouse as fast as willing hands could throw the boxes on. Word was dispatched to rush the truck to the train—it arrived in three minutes. The train was being shifted ready for the move. Our expert driver (a racing pilot in the States) was game, and followed the train, stopping where it stopped, while the boxes fairly flew from truck to car. [47]

Finally the French train officials ordered our truck away that the train might pull out. Our manager said, "Un minute, s'il vous plait," while the boxes continued to fly. The Frenchmen, becoming excited, waved their arms and cursed and threatened in their own tongue. What we could not understand did not frighten us, and the merry chase continued until, in spite of our interference, the train began to move, and with a few parting shots at the still open door, our men in the car placed them as best they could, closed the door and swung from the moving train.

It was great sport, and to hear the cheers of approval from our boys, for whom all this energy was being expended, was ample reward for our fatigue and loss of sleep. [48]

The movement of troop trains was always a special target for Boche bombing planes, and several times during the night Fritz tried to "get" us. Each time, however, he was successfully driven off by our anti-aircraft and machine guns. Whenever we heard the planes overhead and shrapnel began to burst around us, we would scurry to cover underneath the cars, which gave us protection from the falling pieces of shrapnel and the machine-gun bullets.

Troop trains had a never waning interest for civilian and soldier alike. The French freight cars are about half the size of our American cars. The box cars were filled with horses and men. The horses were led up a gangplank to the door in the center of the car and backed toward each end of the car with their heads facing each other. Four horses abreast, making eight in the car, completely filled it, leaving only a four-foot alleyway between them, where the men in charge of the horses made themselves as comfortable as circumstances permitted. Sometimes the men were crowded so tight into the cars that they could neither sit nor lie down. Usually, however, they had more room, and in every open doorway they sat with their feet hanging outside. A jollier bunch of fellows never donned uniform. [49]



GERMAN AERIAL BOMB
(Large)

The flat-cars were loaded with gun carriages, ammunition wagons, and field kitchens. On one car of every train were three mounted machine guns with their crews, in readiness for any daring Boche plane that might swoop down on them. Most of the trains that traveled by day were camouflaged with branches of green leaves broken from trees or bushes.

When the last train had departed at three o'clock in the morning, we had a jollification banquet of canned fruit and fish with bread and coffee, first having gone in noisy procession through all the sleeping quarters and routed out all who were snatching a "wink of sleep."

[50]

On the day previous Armstrong went ahead with two of our canteen workers, O'Connor and Baldwin, and a camionette load of supplies and cocoa and set up a temporary canteen, ready to welcome the troops when they arrived at Ravigny. Dr. Anderson in the Ford Sedan also went ahead to choose suitable headquarters and a warehouse in which to store our fifteen carloads of supplies.

A "Y" MOTOR CONVOY

At eleven in the forenoon, after spending the morning packing and loading, our convoy started. All drivers knew the route to Ravigny, to which point all troop trains had been dispatched under sealed orders. First in line were our pilots in an Indian motorcycle and sidecar. They carried our official passes which they presented to each guard en route. Then after all had passed they proceeded to the next guard. Second in line was a Ford touring car with our chief of transportation and other officials. Next came a camionette loaded with food supplies and cooking equipment, and after it the Renault truck (the writer driving) loaded with office supplies, cash boxes, and personal baggage. Last of all was a big three-ton truck with a miscellaneous load and trailing a small truck loaded with garage tools. This was our traveling repair shop in charge of our mechanic. The rest of the staff with their personal baggage went by train.

[51]

Ravigny is a small town but an important railroad center from which troop trains were re-routed to various points on the front line. Our division was ordered to proceed to Riccicourt, a deserted and partly destroyed village about twelve miles west of Verdun and about five miles south of Avoncourt, where our boys went "over the top." The women canteen workers, much to their disappointment, were ordered by the colonel to remain at Ravigny, where they could get accommodations and be saved the danger and distress of the battlefield.

[52]

At Riccicourt officers and men were billeted in every building that afforded any protection from wind or rain. The mass of troops, however, were on the move and bivouacked or quickly set up their dog-tents, wherever the order to "fall out" was given. Every road leading to Avoncourt was filled with the motor transportation of many divisions. Heavy rains at times made the roads impassable, but in some way traffic was maintained.

The Y.M.C.A. workers with the 37th Division were the first on the field. They were the farthest advanced; they had the largest stock of supplies and the most workers of any organization in that sector at the beginning of the drive. From this center a supply station was established at Avoncourt, where hot chocolate was served day and night to the men as they were going to and from the line of battle. Hot chocolate and supplies in large quantities were also furnished free to the field-hospitals.

[53]

All secretaries who could possibly be spared were dispatched with packs on their backs, bulging with chocolate and tobacco for the men actually on the firing line. As these secretaries trudged past the long lines of soldiers waiting to "go into action" they would be greeted with a chorus of "Three cheers for the 'Y'"—"You can't lose the Y Men," etc.

When in answer to the requests, "Can't you sell us a cake of chocolate or a pack of Camels?" it was explained, "We can't carry enough for all, and these are for the wounded and the men on the firing line," there came invariably the enthusiastic reply, "That's right—they need it more than we do."

[54]

CHAPTER III

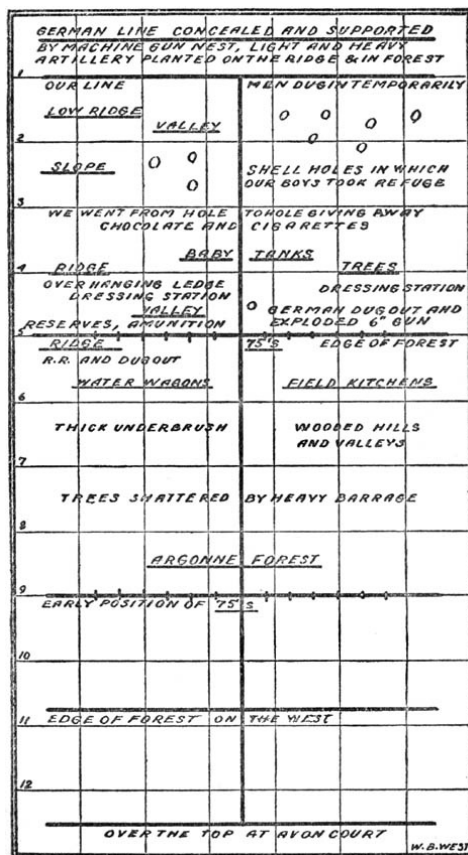
OUR INVINCIBLES

ToC

Twenty years to make a soldier! Well, that depends upon the kind of a soldier you want. There were two kinds in the Argonne Forest from the latter part of September to November in that last year of the great war.

Four long dreadful years the Forest had been the impregnable stronghold of the Kaiser's minions. The last word in the perfection of trench warfare had been spoken by them. The most elaborate preparations for the housing of their men and officers had been made; dugouts of every description, from the temporary "hole in the ground" with a wooden door and a "cootie" bunk to the palatial suite sixty feet underground with cement stairs and floors, and with bathrooms, officers and lounging quarters, all electrically lighted and well heated.

[55]



MEMORY SKETCH OF A SECTOR OF THE BATTLE FIELD 1918

ToList

Machine gun nests had been planted in every conceivable point of vantage from a camouflaged bush on the hillside to the concealed "lookout" in the tallest treetop. Cannon of every caliber had been placed throughout the woods and under the lea of each protecting hill or cliff. A system of narrow-gauge railroads sent its spurs into every part of the Forest, delivering ammunition to the guns and supplies to the men, even connecting by tunnel with some of the largest dugouts.

The Boche had not held this stronghold undisturbed. The traditions of the battlefield, passed from lip to lip, told of numerous and costly offensives by the French and English, but always the same story of failure to take or hold the Forest.

When the American offensive was ready to be launched the French were eager to gamble, first, that our dough-boys could not take the "untakable," and second, that if by any miraculous procedure they succeeded in breaking the German line, they could not hold what they had taken. This did not mean that they doubted the courage or the ability of our men, but that they did have knowledge of the impregnable nature of the German stronghold.

[56]

On that eventful morning near the end of September, the rainy season having started and the mud of the Argonne vying with the mud of Flanders, our guns began to cough and roar. For three terrific hours they spoke the language of the bottomless pit and caused the very foundations of the earth itself to quiver. Germans taken prisoner by our men afterward acknowledged that they had never heard anything so terrifying in their lives.

Having sent over their letter of introduction, our boys followed in person with a shout and a dash. Over the top and through the wire entanglements of No Man's Land they fairly leaped their way. Hundreds of tons of barbed wire had been woven and interwoven between posts driven into the ground. These posts were in rows and usually stood about three feet out of the ground. The rows were four feet apart.

[57]

Then through the trenches of the German front line they swept, and out across the open country which lay between them and the Forest. The marks of the four years' conflict were everywhere visible: the blackened and splintered remains of trees, the grass-covered shell-holes, the ruined towns and the wooden crosses, silent markers of the tombs of the dead. Besides these were the fresh holes in the fields and on the hillside where our guns had literally blasted the whole face of the ground.

The shell-holes ranged from the washtub size made by the 75's to the great fissure-torn holes made by the big naval guns, and which would make an ample cellar for an ordinary dwelling house. I have seen horses which had fallen into these great holes shot and covered over because they could not be gotten out without a derrick.

[58]

In the Forest proper our boys encountered machine-gun nests, artillery pieces of every caliber, and the Boche with whom the woods were infested. Besides the opposition of an active enemy, were the natural barriers of deep ravines, stony ridges and cliffs, and in many places an almost impassable barrier of dense underbrush and fallen limbs and trees.

Through all of this, however, our boys pushed that first great day, ignoring every danger which

they were not compelled to conquer in their rapid advance. When they emerged from the Forest they swept down the hillside, through the gas-filled valley, and stormed the ridges beyond. On the crest of one of these ridges was Montfaucon, a strongly fortified position, said to have been one of the observation towers of the Crown Prince during the four years of the war. Having surrounded and taken this stronghold, they swept on through the next valley and having reached their objective ahead of schedule, dug themselves in while the fire of German guns pierced and depleted their ranks.

[59]

Whatever military critics may say, our hearts thrill with pride for these heroes, who being given an objective took it with an impetuosity which caused them to even outrun their own barrage. And having taken it, to hold on for days at whatever cost until the heavy artillery could be brought up to support their line and make a new gain possible.

When the first surprise shock was over and the enemy realized that the Americans were really taking their impregnable fortifications, and opening the door for the defeat and bottling up of the whole German army, their resistance stiffened to desperation, and our boys had to literally hew their way to victory.

[60]

In reciting my experiences with the 37th Ohio N.G., Major General C.S. Farnsworth, commanding, I am but echoing those of every other division engaged in that wonderful Argonne battle.

The tragedies of the Argonne will never be fully written or told. Men who have witnessed the butcheries of war are liable to be silent about the worst they have seen. It is the unspeakable.

"Sergeant O'Connor!"

"Here, sir," coming to salute with a snap.

"There is a machine-gun nest in the top of a big tree a mile from here on the left of the road leading over the hill. Silence it."

"Yes, sir!" again coming to salute and turning to carry out the order of his captain. He knew the danger, but executed the order.

When this tree was pointed out to us we understood how difficult had been the task. The limbs had been shot off, but the great trunk was unhurt. About forty feet from the ground the limbs branched and there a nest had been built for the machine gun, which commanded the forest trail and the surrounding country.

[61]

On the morning of the third day of the "big push" five "Y" men started with heavy packs of supplies to find our brave lads of the 37th who were somewhere in the line. We were given as guides two privates who were returning to the front for more prisoners. They had brought in many prisoners that morning. I was interested and drew one of them into conversation.

"How many prisoners did you have?"

"A bunch of fifty. We captured so many that first day it was hard to get them all back quickly to the retention camps."

"I suppose they were all disarmed."

"O yes, all weapons were taken from them and they were searched for secret messages or information which would be valuable to our army."

[62]

"Were they allowed to keep any of their belongings?"

"Only the clothes they wore and their caps. Sometimes they would also keep their gas masks and canteens."

We were on a forest trail. The mud from recent rains covered our leggings and our heavy hobnail shoes. We came to a crossroads in the heart of the Forest. Our wounded on stretchers were everywhere. I can see now the bandaged eyes of the gassed patients, the armless sleeve or the bared breast with the bloody dressings. I can see the silent forms of those who would never fight again.

But my heart thrills as the white armband with its red cross comes out sharp and distinct in the picture. Our doctors and surgeons were the miracle-workers of that awful field of slaughter. And the ambulance men were the angels of mercy to thousands whose life blood was wasting fast away.

[63]

The "Y" man with his pack always received a sincere welcome. There was a smile of gratitude as a piece of chocolate was placed in the mouth of one whose hands were useless, or a cigarette and a light given to another whose whole frame was aquiver from the shock of battle. There were the eager requests of the Red-Cross men for extra supplies for the boys whom they would see when Mr. Y-Man was not with them.

"A dead Hun is the only good Hun"—this was a war definition, and true at least while the battle was on. Everywhere through the Forest were Boche made "good" by American bullets. Near a dead German officer was a group of our boys looking over the "treasures" which his pockets held. There was also a photo of a French officer. Evidently, the Hun had earlier in the war killed the Frenchman and taken his picture for a souvenir. Was it poetic justice that the Hun should fall victim to a Yank bullet, and that the photo of his captive, together with his own, should be taken by his American slayer and given as souvenirs to a Y.M.C.A. secretary?

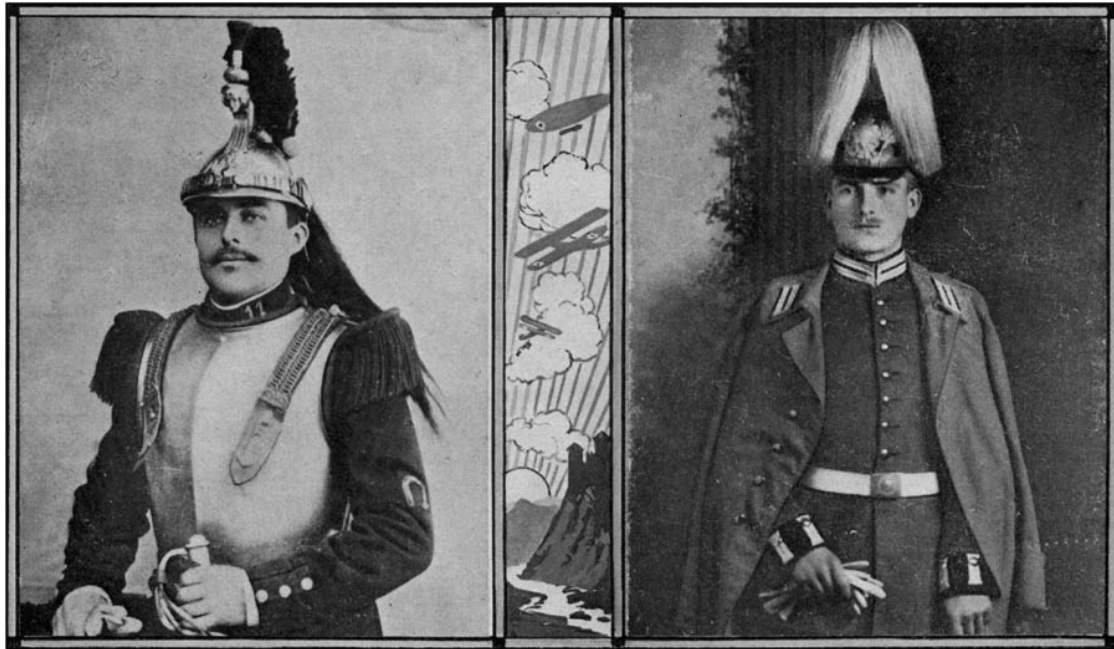
[64]

I was one of a score of "Y" men who followed Farnsworth's division into action, establishing hot chocolate stations and carrying on our backs great packs of chocolate, cigarettes, and tobacco

which we gave away to the boys on the battlefield. There we met the wounded who, having received first aid, were being carried on stretchers back to the field dressing stations, where the army surgeons were working feverishly under trees or in protected valleys. From here continuous lines of stretcher-bearers with their precious burdens moved back to the field hospitals.

On the edge of the Forest near Montfaucon and about three miles back of the line was the nearest field hospital in an elaborate system of German dugouts. The location was well concealed on a hill thickly covered by forest trees and a dense tangle of underbrush. Much time had been spent by the Boche soldiers in making it not only secure but attractive. Rustic fences protected the wooden walks leading to the main entrance. A maze of paths as in a garden, connected the various entrances (doorways). Long flights of wooden steps led down fifteen, twenty, and even thirty feet underground. The deepest cave was connected by a tunnel with the railway system that had branches everywhere through the Forest.

[65]



FRENCH OFFICER
GERMAN OFFICER

ToList

When we found the head surgeon we told him we had chocolate for his patients. He took us to one of the wards where thirty men were crowded into four small rooms. The odor of death was in the air. The labored breathing of unconscious men cast a gloom that was hard to shake off.

"How do you stay here and keep sane?" I asked the doctor in charge. For five days and nights he had scarcely slept, and all he had to eat was what he prepared for himself on a little stove in the six-by-ten room that served for office and living quarters of himself and his assistant. "The boys are wonderful," he said, "and one forgets himself in trying to save them."

[66]

As we went from cot to cot with a piece of chocolate for each, gripping the hands of some and looking into the eyes of others too far gone even to speak, we knew he had spoken the truth. No complaint escaped their lips. The light of a great new dawn kindled in the eyes of many, and their smile of gratitude for the kindness done them made the small service rendered a sacrament sacred on the field of battle.

Returning one evening after a wonderful but terrible day with the boys on the front, we worked our way along a ridge where our 75's were belching fire into the ranks of the enemy. We were giving out the last of our supplies to the crews who were manning these guns. I stopped to speak to an infantry major who was directing the movements of his men by telephone and messenger from a former German dugout where he had taken up temporary headquarters. When I came up he was standing by a gun looking out over the battlefield and watching the stretcher bearers returning from the "line." He had tried in vain to get more artillery sent forward to support his men who were being mowed down by the merciless fire from the Boche machine guns and cannon. At first his voice choked with emotion, and then revenge took possession of him as he cursed the Hun for bringing upon the world such slaughter. It seemed as if his great heart would burst as he realized the suffering and the sacrifice of *his boys* whom he had ordered to *hold* at any cost. His voice choked as he cried, "My God, but they are punishing my boys."

[67]

As we walked on in a driving rainstorm and through mud and underbrush and wormed our way amid wire entanglements, we came upon a field kitchen and were invited to supper. We gladly accepted and sat down in the rain to potatoes and meat, bread, butter, and coffee, with a dessert of pancakes and syrup. It was a meal fit for a king, and no food ever tasted quite so sweet. It was about fifteen miles to our hut, and darkness had overtaken us. While we were eating, an empty ammunition cart drawn by four horses came along, and the sergeant in charge offered us a ride. The offer was gladly accepted because we had no guide, and for two hours we bumped over the rough forest trail.

[68]

On the way we overtook many of our wounded, who after receiving first aid had attempted to walk back to the camps in the rear. Wherever we found them we gave them a lift to the nearest rest camp or ambulance station. Some whom we were privileged to help seemed completely exhausted and unable to drag any farther.

[69]

When at last the forest trail opened into the highway the going was faster. When within three miles of Avoncourt we were stopped by a tieup in traffic. After a few minutes' wait, seeing that there was no sign of advancing, we decided to walk on. For two solid miles the road was blocked, the rains having made the roads almost impassable. We worked our way in and out past ammunition wagons, Red Cross ambulances, officers' cars, and army trucks. Just before midnight we reached our huts at Avoncourt, where hot chocolate was being served to never-ending lines of tin-helmeted, khaki-clad wearers of the gas mask.

Through this town, now leveled to the ground by four years of intermittent bombardment, we groped our way to a temporary "Y" supply hut, where we hoped to spend the night. Upon opening the door we discovered that every available foot of space on the bare ground floor was occupied by "Y" men rolled up in their blankets. They were so exhausted from their long hikes to the front, or their continuous serving at the chocolate canteen, that they could sleep anywhere. We quickly decided to continue our tramp another eight miles to the base headquarters, which we reached at three in the morning drenched and exhausted and literally covered with mud. After three hours of good refreshing sleep we were up again and ready to serve our boys—the invincibles.

[70]

CHAPTER IV

HOLDING THE LINE

[71]

ToC

"On to Berlin," was the cry of the whole Yank army. And the boys were impatient of every delay that kept them from their goal. They all felt like the colored private from Alabama who was asked to join a French class: "No, I don' want to study French. I want to study German."

After the hisses had died down some one asked, "Why is it you want to study German rather than French?"

"I'se goin' to Berlin."

Then the hisses gave way to cheers.

It was that same spirit which caused Corporal Cole, of the Marines, to say: "The marines do not know such a word as 'retreat.'" That was the spirit which brought the curt reply from Col. Whittlesey when the Huns asked his "Lost Battalion" to surrender.

[72]

The American army was a victorious army. It had never been defeated. It had faith in its ideals. Those ideals were neither selfish nor arrogant. It wore no boastful "Gott mit uns" on its belt. It desired only the opportunity of striking low that nation which dared to dictate terms to the Almighty as well as to men. It braved three thousand miles of submarine peril to meet such an enemy.

Even an invincible army has to breathe and eat and sleep. They can hold their breath long enough to adjust a gas mask, but the mask tells us that even in gas they must be enabled to breathe. In the heat of the chase when the Hun is the hare, they can forget for a time that they are hungry, but the field kitchen testifies to the fact that hunger undermines courage and that an efficient army must be a well-fed army.

To see men curled up in muddy shell-holes with the sky for canopy, peacefully sleeping, while cannon are booming on every side and shells whining overhead, is sufficient evidence that sleep is not a myth invented by the Gods of Rest.

[73]

While the spirit of the boys was willing to go right through to Berlin, their flesh asserted its weakness. Their first dash over the top was invincible, and we were told that in ten hours they swept forward to their goal sixty hours ahead of schedule. There they dug in and for four days *held the line* in the face of a murderous and desperate German fire.

During those four awful days I saw no sign of "yellow," but everywhere relentless courage.

"Hello, Mr. Y-Man, don't you want to see a fellow that has three holes through him and still going strong?"

"You don't really mean it, do you? Show him to me. I want to look into the eyes of such a man." They led me over to a bunch of soldiers who had just come out of the line and there in the center of an admiring crowd was my man, happy as a lark. His three wounds—one in the left breast, one in the thigh, and a scalp wound—had been dressed, and while these wounds had glorified him in the eyes of his comrades, *he* was ready to *forget* them.

[74]

Even though a hundred shells exploding near by miss you, and you become convinced that Fritz does not really have your name and address, yet each explosion registers its shock on the nerve centers. If this be long-continued, the nerves give way and you find yourself a shell-shock patient, tagged and on your way to one of the quiet back areas where you can forget the war and get a grip upon yourself again.

Holding the line in open warfare costs a heavy toll in human life, but here again our boys showed their invincible spirit. Not once did I see a Yankee that showed any eagerness to get away from the line. The mortally wounded accepted the sacrifice they had been called upon to make without bemoaning fate, and remained cheerful to the end. Of course when a man was "*facing West*" he longed for the loved faces and the heaven of home. We who had our own "little heaven" back in the homeland knew and instinctively read those sacred thoughts and prayers and gave just the hand-pressure of deep sympathy. [75]

To have *spoken* of home at such a time would have been to tear the heart already breaking, with a deep anguish that would interfere with their possibility of recovery. So the cheery word of hope and faith was given, and any final message quietly taken and faithfully and sacredly fulfilled.

The wounded men whom we met coming out of the line who were not "facing West" were with one accord hopeful of speedy recovery, not that they might "save their own skin" and get back home alive, but that they might get back into the fight and help to put forever out of commission that devilish military machine that had threatened the democratic freedom of the world. [76]

Then again there were the boys who had miraculously escaped being wounded, and after days in the very bowels of hell, which no pen can picture and no tongue recite, had been released from the line and were working their way back to the food kitchens, the water carts, and the rest of the camps. One such doughboy, I met near Montfaucon, about midway between the front line and an artillery ridge where our 75's were coughing shells in rapid succession upon the entrenched foe. His water canteen had long been empty and the nourishment of his hard tack and "corn willie"^[2] forgotten. His lips were parched with thirst and bleeding from cracks, the result of long-continued gun fire. His body was wearied by the heavy strain, his cheeks were gaunt from hunger and his eyes circled for want of rest. His whole bearing was of one who had passed through suffering untold, and yet there was no word of bitterness or complaint. His gratitude for a sup of water from my canteen was richer to me than the plaudits of multitudes, and the fine courage with which he worked his painful way back to rest and refreshment caused my heart to yearn after him with a tenderness which he can never know. [77]

Where a division is merely holding the line, there being no aggressive action on either side, except night-raiding parties, men can stand it for a longer period. Under such circumstances a company would stay in the front line for ten days, part being on guard while the others were sleeping. At the end of the ten days they would be relieved by a fresh company and return to a rest camp in the rear. The boys hardly considered it *rest*, as there was constant drilling, besides camp duties and activities of many kinds. [78]

Out in No Man's Land we had our "listening" and "observation" posts. These posts are set as near the enemy line as possible. It is very hazardous work, and requires steady nerves and clear heads. Each squad in a post remains for forty-eight hours, and each man of the squad is on actual guard for four hours at a time.

Where men are *on the line in aggressive warfare*, the action is so intense that they cannot stand up under long-continued fighting. In the Argonne fight our Ohio division was on the front line for five days after going "over the top." Then they were relieved by a fresh division, which took their places under cover of the night.

As our boys came out I stood all night with another "Y" man on a German narrow-gauge railroad crossing, giving a smoke or a piece of chocolate to each man as he passed. The enthusiastic expressions of the great majority bore ample testimony to their keen appreciation. "You're a life-saver," is the way they put it. [79]

Now let me give you a glimpse of the fine courage and noble manhood of the boys who were actually facing the foe in the front line. I have been with them in many positions and under varied circumstances even up to within three hundred yards of the Boche line. First a great word—*A Yank never feared his enemy*.

The most horrible stories of Hunnish brutality and barbarity only served to intensify the Yanks' desire to strike that enemy low. One of our splendid fellows, a private of the 102nd Infantry, came frequently into our station at Rimaucourt where I was a hut secretary during the first month of my stay in France. I felt instinctively that he had a story which he might tell, although he had the noncommittal way of an officer on the Intelligence Staff. Through several days of quiet fellowship the story came out. [80]

It was during the time when the Boche were smashing their way toward Paris. It takes more courage to face a foe when he is on the aggressive than when he is being *held* or *driven back*. Our hero's company was meeting an attack. He had previously lost a brother, victim of a Boche bullet. The spirit of vengeance had stealthily entered his very soul, and secretly he had vowed to avenge that brother's death with as great a toll of enemy lives as possible, if the opportunity came to him.

No man ever knows what he will do under fire until the test comes, but be it said to their glory, our boys never failed when the crucial hour came. (They were soldiers not of training but of character.) Quietly, with unflinching courage, our boys awaited the onslaught. Finally when the

command to fire was given our friend selected his men—no random fire for him. One by one he saw his victims drop until he had accounted definitely for six. The next man was a towering Prussian Guard. A lightning debate flashed through his mind and stayed momentarily his trigger finger. Was a swift and merciful bullet sufficient revenge, or should he wait and give his foe that which he so much feared, the cold steel? The momentary hesitation ended the debate, for the Guard was almost upon him. Quickly he prepared for the shock, and, parrying the Hun's first thrust, he gave him the upward stroke with the butt of his gun; but the Hun kept coming, and he quickly brought his gun down—his second stroke cutting the head with the blade of his bayonet. The Prussian reeled but was not finished, and as he came again our friend pricked him in the left breast with the point of his bayonet in an over-hand thrust of his rifle. Still he had failed to give his foe a lethal stroke, and as he recoiled for a final encounter he resolved to give him the full benefit of a body thrust and drove his bayonet home, the blade breaking as the foe crashed to the ground.

[81]

There is a sequel to this story which we must never forget. Whatever may have been the undaunted heroism of our boys when in action, each one of them not only "had a heart" but also a conscience. And while *war*, which is *worse* than Sherman's "hell," suspends for the time the heart appeal and stifles the conscience, the reaction is almost invariably the same.

[82]

FOOTNOTES:

- [2] "Corn willie" was corned beef carried in small tin cans and eaten cold when on the march.

[83]

CHAPTER V

TANKS AND TRACTORS

ToC

The infantry is the most mobile of any division of the army. Men can go where horses and guns find it impossible. They can file silently through narrow passes or a maze of forest trees and underbrush. They can scale cliffs. They can dodge shell-holes and negotiate muddy roads and morasses. They can move slowly or quickly at will and can therefore take difficult positions where it is impossible quickly to bring up artillery support.

The Ohio boys were in the line exposed to the merciless and cruel machine-gun and artillery fire of the enemy. It was said that the Germans had one machine gun for every two of our rifles. The conflict was desperate. The enemy realized that their cause depended upon their practical annihilation of the American troops. These fighters, who with such courage and disregard of danger had taken this part of the impregnable Hindenburg line, now threatened their supporting lines. It is no disgrace to acknowledge that during those awful initial days of the Argonne drive we paid the price that an army advancing must pay. Of course it was heart-breaking to see the long lines of our stretcher-bearers coming out of that belching brimstone line with the punctured and broken bodies of our boys. But it was glorious to know that the line had not wavered. *How long could they last?* And how speedily could artillery be brought to their aid? These were the momentous questions that quivered on every lip and that gave imperative urgency to the commands and appeals of the officers who watched with choking emotion the slaughter of "their boys."

[84]

As we gazed over the valley we saw to the left a line of slow-crawling tanks. They were about as long as Ford cars and as tall as a man. They were the French "baby tanks" coming up to help our boys clean out the machine-gun nests. It was perfectly fascinating and almost uncanny to watch tanks in action. There was no visible sign of life or power, nor any seeming direction to their motion. They crawled stealthily along, bowling over bushes or small trees or flattening out wire entanglements. Steep banks or deep gulleys were taken or crossed with equal ease. As a tank would creep up the side of a ridge it seemed to poise momentarily on the crest, the front part extending out into space until the center of gravity was passed, when the whole tank plunged down headlong. We instinctively held our breath until we saw it crawling away on the opposite side.

[85]

The tanks parked behind a hill. We worked our way through the intervening valley, up the hill past the tank position, and on toward the battle-line, giving out our supplies to all we met or passed. Before we had finished, a Boche plane flew overhead, took a photo of the tank position,

[86]

and got away to the German lines before our aviators could give chase. We were warned to retreat to a safe position because the German guns would shell this area as soon as the returning scout brought in news of the location of the tanks. Our first concern, however, was the service we might be able to render the boys. Personal safety was a secondary matter, especially since death lurked everywhere. So we continued across a shell-torn slope, toward the enemy line, going from shell-hole to shell-hole and giving a word of good cheer, a bit of chocolate, and some smokes to the boys who had taken temporary refuge in these ready-made "dug-ins" (a shallow protection).

Having ministered to the wants of our own boys, we felt the brave French pilots and gunners of these tanks were also deserving and as we approached each tank on our return trip a small iron door in front of the pilot opened, and the courteous appreciation, of which the French are masters, told us that our remembrance of them had been wisely chosen. Fritz was unintentionally good to us and waited until we had finished our task in that sector and retraced our steps across the valley before he began to shell it. By that time the wounded had also been cared for and removed and the tank position changed. For once Heinie's shells were wasted.

[87]

For ten wonderful days my duties took me (on foot, by touring-car, by truck, and by ammunition wagon) from the "rail-head" six miles behind the trenches where our boys went "over the top" on that first historic day of the Argonne drive, up to within a half mile of the day's farthest advance.

I saw artillery pieces and heavy cannon emplacements everywhere back of the line. I saw these guns after their first terrific bombardment, unlimbered and moved up to their new positions. The heaviest guns, including the big naval guns, were especially well concealed in woods, in orchards, and well camouflaged in fields. So well hidden were they that I passed within a few rods of multitudes of them, as I traveled the roads, without detecting their presence until I would either hear the discharge of their shells or see them as they were being unlimbered. To move a heavy gun in mud is no small task. For more than an hour one day I was held up in a truck and watched a dozen experts, with block and tackle and "caterpillar tractor" move a twelve-inch monster from its hidden foundation up a slight incline toward the roadway. It was an hour well spent, for it gave me an object lesson concerning the difficulty with which great field pieces are moved under unfavorable conditions.

[88]

By way of contrast, I watched at another time a crew of eight men unlimber an eight-inch gun and move it about fifteen feet from its foundation beside a railroad track to a flat car, which could carry it at express speed to some other point of vantage. This told the great value of railroad spurs leading up toward the enemy lines.

[89]

At one place our boys told me of one of our "mysterious" guns, mounted on a specially prepared flat car, which made nightly trips out to different points of vantage for firing on some enemy position, returning again under cover of the darkness to its secret hiding place.

Having seen the battlefields and behind the lines of both the Allied and the German forces; and having noted the military efficiency of the German preparation and their care in carrying out even the minutest details; and having observed the skill in preparation and the accuracy in use, especially of the French artillery; and having been thrilled and pleased by the quick and ingenious adaptation of our American army to the best and most efficient use of every type of weapon, I am thoroughly convinced that an intelligent army, governed by Christian ideals, is an invincible army, no matter what temporary advantage military preparedness may have given to the enemy.

[90]

[91]

CHAPTER VI

PEN PICTURES

ToC

GERMAN SNIPER IN CRUCIFIX

At Chemin des Dames, near Soissons, one night about the middle of April, four Americans (one of Italian birth) belonging to the 102d United States Infantry, made up a raiding party. Their objective was a crucifix out in No Man's Land, about four hundred yards from their own trench and within two hundred and fifty yards of the German trenches. The crucifix was a monument containing a secret inner chamber reached by a small spiral stairway. A Boche sniper concealed in this crucifix had taken a toll of American soldiers at that point in the line. The four night raiders left the American trench at one o'clock in the morning. They crawled on their bellies through snow for one hour before reaching the sniper's post. Seven yards per minute is a snail's pace, but pretty good time in No Man's Land, where you must remain motionless each time a star-shell lights up the darkness around you and makes your discovery possible.

[92]

The Italian won the privilege of entering the crucifix to capture the sniper. His weapon must be a silent weapon, for a shot would expose the presence of the whole party. He chose a razor, and when he emerged from the crucifix he brought with him, as proof that he had satisfactorily executed his order, the Hun's rifle, fieldglasses, and identification card. Needless to say, no further trouble from Boche snipers was experienced at that point. The return trip was made with less caution and they were discovered. When within fifty yards of their own lines a heavy machine gun barrage opened upon them. It then became a race for life, but they reached the safety of their own trenches without a scratch.

[93]

GERMAN INFERNAL MACHINES

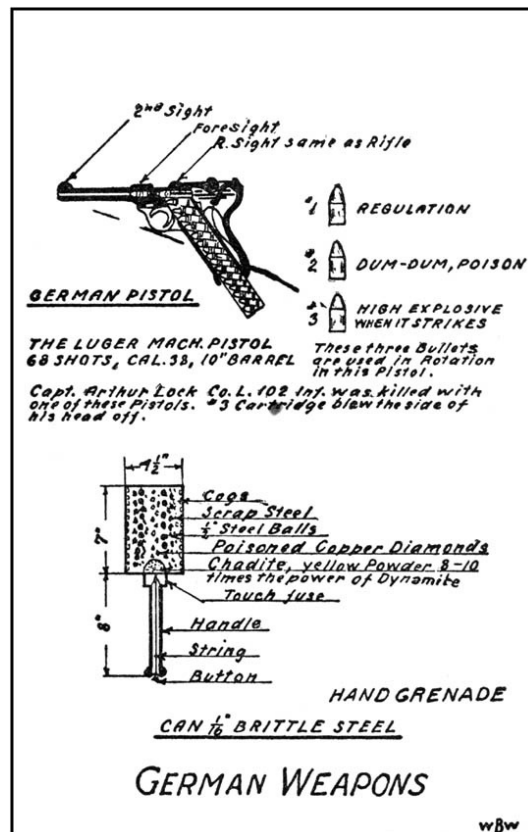
In the German dugouts all through the Argonne Forest and on the battlefields were found a multitude of death-dealing devices intended to invite the curiosity of the Yankee souvenir hunters.

In one dugout near the edge of the Forest we found a mysterious-looking box which we let severely alone. I had seen the diagram of a similar box, which had been carefully dissected by a member of the Intelligence Squad. This German trap was a finely polished box about fourteen inches long by six inches at its widest part, and disguised as a music box. It had polished hinges and lock and an alligator handle in the center of the top. It had also a monogram in one corner. Inside the box were two squash-shaped grenades about nine inches long and filling the whole center of the box. In the big end of the box was a compartment filled with chaddite, a yellow powder, eight times as powerful as dynamite. Attached to the grenades were four friction handles so connected with the alligator handle on top as to explode the bombs when the box was lifted. In event of the frictions failing to work, or the intended victim opening the box some other way there was a two-second fuse inserted in the end of each bomb, and extending into the chaddite compartment, to be set off by the removal of the lid.

[94]

A hand grenade was used by them which our boys called potato-mashers. The head of the potato-masher was a can made of one-sixteenth-inch brittle steel. The can was about seven inches long by four and one-half inches in diameter. Around the inside of the can was a layer of small steel cogs. Inside these a layer of small steel balls. The next layer was of small ragged-edged scrap steel pieces and the next, poisoned copper diamonds. The center was filled with chaddite. On one end of the can was a hollow steel handle about eight inches long. A string passing through this handle was attached on the inside to a touch fuse imbedded in the chaddite; the other end of the string was tied to a button on the handle. By pulling the button the fuse was set off.

[95]



GERMAN WEAPONS

ToList

Imagine the destruction wrought by one of these exploding in a company of soldiers. I have seen many of them through the Argonne, but we had been warned of their danger and chose other weapons as souvenirs.

This story was from the lips of a doughboy whose home was in Philadelphia. I had piloted Mr. Cross, of the Providence Journal, through the surgical wards of Base Hospital No. 18. This was the Johns Hopkins Hospital Unit located at Bazoilles (pronounced Baz-wy). One of the nurses said, "Have you seen Tony in Ward N? He has a wonderful story."

[96]

So we went to Ward N, and in a private room at the end of the ward found our hero, who was rapidly recovering and anxious to be of further service to the land of his adoption. His right eye was gone. A German bullet was responsible for its loss. Thus wounded and unable to escape he had been surrounded and taken prisoner by the Boche who forced him to walk on ahead of them.

"When I was unable to drag along as fast as they demanded, I was shot at by one of the Huns, the bullet making a flesh wound in my left leg. They then decided to kill me and shot me through the heart, as they supposed. I was left for dead, but the bullet had missed my heart. For six days I lay out in an open field, living but unable to move."

Then his voice lowered as he told us the awful nauseating story of how he endeavored to quench the unbearable thirst of those terrible days. At last he was found by our men who had conquered and driven back the Hun.

[97]

This brave Italian boy had suffered as few are ever permitted to suffer and live, but his fine spirit was still unconquered. He was not seeking pity. He told the story because we asked for it. He told it as though it was the merest incident of his life. There was no word of complaint at having suffered the losses which would cripple him for life.

It is the same old story that all have told who have witnessed the splendid courage of our men. I have seen thousands in the hospitals and on the battlefield, many of them literally shot to pieces, and I have yet to hear the first complaint. And only in two or three instances have I heard even a groan escape the lips of a man, unless he was under the influence of ether.

"ALLIED AIR FLEETS"

Having watched with keen interest the rapid growth and development of the Allied air program, I was ready to be properly thrilled by the maneuvers of our American squadrons operating in conjunction with the army in preparation for the great Argonne drive.

[98]

I have seen three fleets in the air at one time over Avoncourt after that wonderful offensive had been launched. Part were Liberty bombing planes with their loads of destruction for German military bases. Part were the speedy little "Spads" which were used as scout planes. They were very light and small and capable of terrific bursts of speed.

I could appreciate the importance of the bombing planes, for I had once been privileged to help load one of the monster Handley-Page British bombing planes. It weighed seven tons, including its load of sixteen 100-pound bombs, and was manned by two pilots and a machine gunner.

I am conscious even yet of the thrills that pricked my spine, as this monster with nineteen companions spurned the earth in a mad, rushing leap out into space and sailed away into the night to let the inhabitants of German towns know that "frightfulness" was a game at which two could play.

[99]

The Liberty motors were highly praised by our pilots, and I am ready to add my testimony to the steadiness and reliability of the "ship" which was under so much discussion and investigation over here.

On October 10, with Lieutenant Wilson, of the 163rd Aero Squadron, in a two-seated Liberty I took a "jump" over the Meuse Valley. As we bumped over the ground in our first sudden dash, and then birdlike rose quickly into the air, my sensations were not the hair-raising variety so often described by the thrilled amateur. When we "banked" however, on a sharp turn, I had my first real sensation—I quickly braced myself lest I fall overboard. At thirty-five hundred feet the fields looked like green-and-brown patches, the forests like low bushes, and the railroads, highways, and rivers like tracer lines across the face of a map.

[100]

From that altitude the earth was beautiful. The enchantment of distance had blotted out the rubbish heaps. The yellow waters of the turbid streams glistened in the sun and the very mud itself, which the day before had prevented my flight, was now but a smooth, golden surface.

"A PUBLIC HANGING IN WAR TIME"

On July 12 it was rumored that a soldier had been sentenced to be hung the next day at ten o'clock for an unspeakable crime. The gallows was already built on the edge of the camp at Bazoilles. I saw it on my afternoon trip and knew that the report was true. Being interested in the psychology of such a scene on the men present, I put aside my inward rebellion at so gruesome a sight and arranged my trip so as to be present. I reached the camp at nine forty-five and was the last man admitted. The gallows was built in the center of the semicircle facing two hills which came abruptly together, leaving a large grass plot at their base. This formed a natural amphitheater. About two thousand soldiers, both white and colored, were seated on the grass

[101]

inside a rope inclosure. A company of soldiers from another camp had been marched in to act as guards, and they formed a complete circle standing just outside the ropes and extending down to the gallows on either side.

Many French civilians and visiting soldiers lined the edges or looked down from points of vantage on the hillside. I stood on one side about one hundred feet from the "trap." At nine fifty a Red Cross ambulance drove up, and the prisoner, his hands bound behind him, alighted, and accompanied by a guard and the officials, walked up a dozen wooden steps to the platform. He was escorted to the front of the platform, and in a clear, strong voice spoke to the almost breathless crowd. He acknowledged with sorrow his crime, and urged upon all the necessity of being true to God and their country. He stepped back on the "trap," the black cap was drawn over his head, the noose placed about his neck, the "trap" sprung, and with a sickening thud he dropped to his doom. For twenty minutes, from nine fifty to ten ten, his body hung there before he was pronounced by the attending surgeon officially dead. [102]

I never witnessed a twenty minutes of such deathly silence. Two guards fainted, and the effect on the crowd was indescribable. I overheard a colored fellow say, "I never want to do anything bad again as long as I live."

The body was immediately cut down, placed in a coffin, and taken in the ambulance to its burial. It was a silent, thoughtful company that went out from that tragic scene.

"THE AMERICAN DEAD"

 [103]

"Will we be able to locate the body of our boy?"

So often has this question been asked me that I must take a moment to answer it.

I watched two American military burial plots grow from the first lone grave to small cities of our noble dead. One was at Bazoilles, half way between Chaumont and Toul. The other was at Baccarat near the Alsatian border. Each grave was marked with a little wooden cross bearing the name and rank of the soldier, and beside each cross an American flag.

Many were buried in French cemeteries. At Neufchateau a section was set aside for the use of our American army. When I visited it there were about one hundred new-made graves all plainly marked, and fresh flowers on each grave.

Of course most of the French cemeteries were Catholic, and Protestant bodies could not be granted burial within the walls. A touching story is told of an American Protestant soldier buried close outside the wall of a Catholic graveyard. During the night French civilians tore down the wall at that place and rebuilt it around their comrade of a different faith. It was a beautiful symbol of the new dawn of peace when all nations and all creeds shall recognize the common brotherhood of all God's children. [104]

FRANCE A GREAT SCRAP HEAP

Now that the war is over, France is a vast junk heap of arms and equipment that cost a mint of money and the brains and lives of millions of men.

For generations to come the soil of France will be disclosing to the peasants who till her fields, the fragments of war's destructive power and the bones of heroes who bled and died.

On the battlefields I saw innumerable quantities of equipment, together with guns and ammunition, which had cost millions to produce but were valueless in so far as their future use was concerned. I saw the Place de la Concorde and the Tuileries Garden in Paris packed with one thousand captured German guns and more than a score of Boche planes and observation balloons. On one great pile were three thousand Boche helmets, carefully wired together and closely guarded so that souvenir hunters could not slip them away. It seemed a terrible price to pay for object lessons for the great celebrations commemorating the overthrow of autocracy. But having paid the price it was right to use the trophies. [105]

As the boys went into battle they left behind them great salvage piles of things they would not need in the fight. As they came out of the battle they left great piles of salvage which they fervently hoped the world would never need to use again.

With the world's war bills mounting into the billions, and the value of the salvage piles an almost negligible amount, the material waste of war is appalling. If it will teach the nations to be as generous toward the great reconstruction program as they were toward the overthrow of that autocracy which threatened the world's freedom, then the waste of war has not been in vain. [106]

At Bar le Duc I saw great warehouses under management of the French government stacked to the roof with auto tires and tubes. I had driven with our Division Y.M.C.A. chief, Dr. Norton, from Neufchateau to exchange an auto load of tires which our half dozen cars had worn out, for an equal number of new tires. And I knew that these great piles formed but a small percentage of the hundreds of thousands of rubber shoes needed for the vehicles of war.

I visited the great Renault automobile plant at Nancy, which the French government had taken over for a repair station. Literally thousands of army trucks and official cars were passing through this station in a constant stream, either to be quickly repaired or thrown into the junk [107]

heap. Our own case was typical. Our Renault truck had broken down at Luneville, twenty miles from Nancy. No local man could make the repairs. Through our American army headquarters at Nancy we applied to this French repair station. At eight o'clock next morning I was on hand to pilot a heavy wrecking truck to our car. A towing hawser was attached; their second pilot took charge of our truck, load and all; and before noon we were safely landed at the repair station. A hasty examination by a Renault expert revealed the fact that ten days or more would be required to make the necessary repairs. A day or two was the longest time they could allow any car to remain. So after searching in vain for another garage that would undertake the repairs, we towed the truck to our Y.M.C.A. garage and stored it, that it might be salvaged at some future time.

[108]

France is full of broken-down trucks, touring cars, and ambulances; of worn out engines and the rolling stock of her railways. From the English Channel to the Persian Gulf her battlefields are littered with brass and iron and wood and steel. Besides these there are the great piles of garments of wool and rubber and leather, and the wasting stores of army blankets and cots and surgical supplies.

Into the larger salvage piles will go the multitude of tents and temporary wooden barracks for the housing of the fighters from all nations, who for four dreadful years held that "far-flung battle line."

A part of this larger salvage pile will be the temporary hospitals. In less than a year America alone built and equipped hospitals which were capable of accommodating a million wounded.

[109]

Then from the battle-line to the Atlantic coast we must think of the vast supply stations and warehouses, the great engineering plants and repair shops. America not only built in France the greatest ice plant in the world but she made *every* preparation on a gigantic scale.

When she entered the war she went in to win, even if it would take ten million of her men to finish the job. Had she done less, the final chapter would not yet have been written, and a different story might needs have been told.

HOSPITAL BARRACKS

Day by day I watched the magic growth of the wooden hospital barracks at Rimacourt with accommodations for fifteen thousand men, and was interested in the engineering feat by which an abundance of fresh water was pumped from drilled wells in an old chateau to a great reservoir on the mountain side, and piped from there to every building and ward.

[110]

I watched the same process at Bazoilles as, nestled in the wonderful Meuse valley, that great hospital grew from a single base (the Johns Hopkins Unit) until it included seven bases and was able to care for thirty-five thousand wounded.

I spent one night there ministering to the wounded as they were unloaded from the great American Red Cross train. I watched the process with pride and amazement. So well organized was the army Red Cross that when a train was announced the ambulances loaded with stretcher bearers were rushed to the unloading platform. In seven minutes three hundred helpless men were gently taken from their comfortable berths in the train and carried on stretchers to the platform from which the ambulances speedily bore them to the waiting wards.

During the night of which I speak five trainloads of gassed men from the Chateau-Thierry fight were thus unloaded at Bazoilles.

[111]

CHAPTER VII

MORAL FLASHES

[112]

[ToC](#)

This chapter is plainly labeled so that anyone who chooses may escape it.

A preacher without a preachment is a paradox. We do not fear the paradox, much less the criticism of the over-religious. But we frankly believe that the solution of the moral and spiritual problems of the soldier, as the army attempted to solve them, gives a hint to the churches which dare not be ignored.

The soldier was more truly religious "over there" than he was before he "fared forth" on his great adventure. And the reason was not merely in the fact that fear of death drives men nearer to God. That reason has been present in every war. The history of all wars proves that war engenders such hatred, recklessness, and immorality that fighters have come out of the conflict more godless than when they entered. The veterans of our own Civil War bear abundant

[113]

testimony to the debauchery of youth during the four long years of that struggle.

What is the story of the morality of the American army during the struggle just ended? Already statistics have been compiled showing that the percentage of disease resulting from immorality was so small in comparison with the percentage even in civil life as to be almost negligible. If we could compare the army life of the present with the army life of the past, I am confident the contrast would be even more startling.

Our army was a clean army—an army whose actions and modes of life squared with the highest standards of moral and religious teachings. That there were notable exceptions no one will deny.

Why were our soldiers in this bitter world conflict better and stronger than the soldiers of previous wars? The answer I want you to think about (there are other answers) is that the army and navy officers, from President Wilson down, planned wisely and sanely to meet the physical, mental, and moral needs of our boys both at home and over seas. And the results achieved proved the wisdom of the endeavor. *Had the plans been less comprehensive the results would certainly have been far less gratifying.*

[114]

My own experiences cause me to draw the same conclusions that many others have drawn. "Over there" man stood out before his Maker, his very soul uncovered, and prayed with a frankness he had never expressed before. And God revealed himself. We may not understand the psychology, nevertheless one soldier saw, or thought he saw, Christ in a shell-hole stretching out his hands in forgiveness and blessing. Another saw God the Father giving absolution as his straining eyes caught a glimpse of the crucifix. Another felt "The Presence" as the inward quietness which follows action crept over him. Whatever the form, the effect was the same. Men met God face to face and lived.

[115]

A captain of infantry coming out of the Argonne fight on September 30, said: "I have never been a professed Christian. I have always considered the testimony of so-called Christians as the imagination of religious fanatics. But I saw Christ up there, and I shall never scoff again." A private standing near turned to me and said: "We all felt the same way about it. It was mighty real to us."

Not many decades ago preachers used death as their most telling plea for sinners to be converted. The tragic death of a "sinner" in a community where evangelistic services were being held was always held up as the special warning of God. The crude way in which this truth was presented does not, however, disturb the fundamental fact that death does have a sobering effect on human judgment and human will, and that in the presence of death souls do more naturally seek after and find God.

[116]

A private of Company I, 165th Infantry, was in Base Hospital No. 117 suffering from shell-shock. He said: "There were only seven of my company left. We killed our share of the Huns before they got us, but the slaughter was awful. To see all your comrades shot down around you and then to lie helpless on the field—minutes seemed ages. And decisions were registered in heaven which we can never get away from." This boy had been gay and frivolous at home, with two automobiles at his command and plenty of money to use as he wished. He had never been forced to the serious consideration of the problems of his soul-life until he squarely faced those problems on the field of carnage.

[117]

I was asked to speak at the Y.M.C.A. hut at Rebeval Barracks, where a veterinary hospital occupies the same inclosure as Base Hospital No. 66. My audience was made up largely of East Side New Yorkers. The secretary, Stuart, of Jamaica, said to me before the meeting: "Give them the straight punch. You know how." He led the song service and put plenty of "pep" in it. All the boys were singing who could. The rest were "hollering" and thought they were singing. Even the French soldiers and civilians who could not understand stood at the windows interested spectators. The message was a straight-from-the-shoulder presentation of the life of Jesus Christ and the claims of God upon the lives of all men. Their keen and close interest showed their respect and their spontaneous applause at the close was proof that the message had at least registered. Now, no one is so foolish as to believe that those "rough horsemen" went out from that meeting to give up all their bad habits, but no one will dare deny that their expression of approval and appreciation was an acknowledgment of Christ himself and that they were for the time at least better men.

[118]

A meeting in a converted hay-loft in Brouville was suddenly announced by the Y.M.C.A. secretary. The big stone building was used to billet the soldiers. Their "bunks" filled almost every available foot of space. In one corner a group were playing cards. In the middle of the room a lank, angular figure was "coiled" about a mandolin, coaxing an old hymn from its strings. Some were sleeping, others were chatting, and a few were reading by the light of tallow candles. The secretary announced the meeting. It was Sunday evening. Song books were distributed. The mandolin player volunteered to "pitch the tune." Three or four hymns suggested by the fellows were sung heartily. A brief petition asked for forgiveness and blessings on the boys who with undaunted courage would soon go into action. A few verses of Scripture served to introduce the message of the hour. Quietly but earnestly the practical side of a man's religion was presented. The card game, which up to this time proceeded without disturbance, was now voluntarily abandoned and the players' attention riveted on the speaker. When it was over they quietly returned to their game, more thoughtful, because they had themselves chosen to hear the truth.

[119]

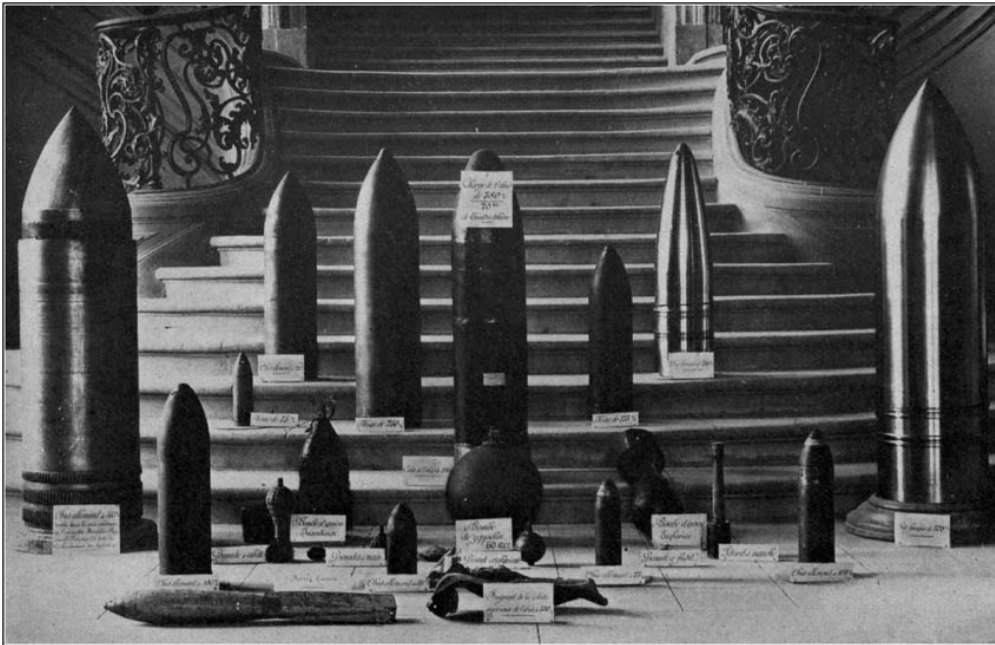
The Y.M.C.A. hut at Reherrey was a mile and a half behind the line. Briggs was the secretary. His fine, erect carriage and soldierly bearing brought him many an unconscious salute from the buck private. He was a Billy Sunday convert. "I have drunk enough rum to float a battleship" was

[120]

the way he told of his wild career. The boys at Reherrey loved and respected him. His Bible class was the most enthusiastic I saw in France. When he announced a Sunday evening service the hut was filled. Candles served as chandelier and desk lamp. With a sergeant who was a live wire at the piano and Briggs as song leader, the singing of the fellows not only "raised the roof" but it also raised the spirits of the men.

About half way through the talk a terrific explosion told us that Fritz was getting busy. Quietly all candles were blown out. It was a military order. Aside from this not a man stirred. The message went right on, punctuated by the exploding shells. There was no fear but an intense interest in the great call of God to the duty of the hour. At the close the men pressed forward to grip the speaker's hand, and as we walked out under the stars, a widow's only son acknowledged that he had long been the victim of the drink curse and had broken his mother's heart. "I have taken my last drink," he said; "I will write to my mother, *but she cannot believe me*. Won't you write her too and tell her that her son has given himself to the Lord Jesus Christ?"

[121]



VARIETIES OF SHELLS AND BOMBS
(Photographed at Nancy)

ToList

The most impressive thing to me about the religion of the soldiers was its wholesomeness. "Over there" a man dared to be natural. The mask of pretense was torn off. Men were not hypocrites in the face of death. They were free; and that freedom showed itself in their religion as well as in their pleasures. The soldier whom I met in the front line trench with "*I need Thee every hour*" printed across the front of his gas mask, was not considered a fanatic.

And when an American Bishop consented to share a Sunday night program with Elsie Janis, the famous vaudeville actress, the great Bishop became suddenly *greater* in the estimation of Christian and non-Christian alike, and the passionately expressive "Elsie" had a new and wholesome interpretation put upon her fun and her jokes by the magic which that combination wrought.

[122]

My plea is for that type of Christianity, so pure as to be above reproach and question and so genuinely human as to enjoy the wit and humor and even the frivolities of life, its Christliness lifting its pleasures out of the mists of evil into which we have permitted the devil to drag them, and placing them side by side with the more serious considerations of our life work.

My observations teach me that the effort of the army to solve the fundamental problem of the soldier's spiritual life met with a large measure of success.

The army took millions of our boys from every walk of life. It sent two and a quarter millions across the sea. It fed them an abundance of plain but wholesome food. It gave them plenty of hard exercise to convert that food into hard muscle. It demanded *attention*, so that a keen mind directed a strong body. It provided the leisure hour with huts where the touch of home suggested the writing of millions of home letters which otherwise would never have been written. Concerts, lectures, reading rooms with books and magazines and games of all kinds were furnished to all—free. Even something *homemade* to eat and drink, in addition to the regular canteen supplies, which covered practically every legitimate desire of the men, could be purchased at reasonable cost.

[123]

Having done all this for his body and his mind, it took a broad view of his spiritual needs, and carefully selected chaplains from the various denominations and creeds and sent them with the boys as their spiritual advisers. So splendidly was the choice of religious leaders made that often on the battlefield a Protestant minister or a Jewish rabbi would borrow a crucifix and bring the word of comfort to a dying Catholic; or a priest would read the Bible or the Prayer Book to a dying Jew or Protestant. On one occasion a woman canteen worker aided a Jewish rabbi to give absolution to a Catholic boy in a Y.M.C.A. hut when a priest could not be secured in time. In all

[124]

this is there not more than a hint for the Church of to-morrow?

These our boys, now men, have come back to become the great leaders of our new civilization, and they will be intolerant of dogmatic denominationalism, and well they may. The church that holds their respect and commands their allegiance must have a world view of Christianity and a Godlike love for the lives of all men. And the theology of to-morrow must be as broad as the teachings of the Bible.

Typographical errors corrected in text:

Page 114: soliders replaced with soldiers

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE FIGHT FOR THE ARGONNE: PERSONAL EXPERIENCES OF A 'Y' MAN ***

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