

BROUN HEYWOOD

OUR ARMY AT
THE FRONT

Heywood Broun

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CHAPTER I

THE LANDING OF PERSHING

A SHIP warped into an English port. Along her decks were lines of soldiers, of high and low degree, all in khaki. From the shore end of her gang-plank other lines of soldiers spread out like fan-sticks, some in khaki, some in the two blues of land and sea fighters. Decorating the fan-sticks were the scarlet and gold of staff-officers, the blue and gold of naval officers, the yellow and gold of land officers, and the black of a few distinguished civilians.

At the end of one shore-line of khaki one rigid private stood out from the rest, holding for dear life to a massive white goat. The goat was the most celebrated mascot in the British Army, and this was an affair of priceless consequence, but that was no sign the goat intended to behave himself, and the private was responsible.

Weaving through this picture of military precision, three little groups of men waited restlessly to get aboard the ship. One was the lord mayor of the port city, his gilt chains of office blazing in the forenoon brightness, with his staff; another was the half-dozen or so of distinguished statesmen, diplomats, and military heroes bringing formal welcome to England; the third was the war correspondents and reporters from the London newspapers.

The waiting was too keen and anxious for talk. Excitement raced from man to man.

For the ship was the *Baltic*. The time was the morning of June 8, 1917. The event was the landing of John J. Pershing, commander of America's Expeditionary Force. And the soldiers with him were the herald of America's coming – the holding of her drive with an outpost.

When the grandchildren of those soldiers learn that date in their history lessons it is safe to assume that all its historical significance will be fairly worked out and articulate.

It is equally safe to say that in the moment of its happening few if any of its participants, even the most consequential and far-seeing, had a personal sense of making history. Of all the pies that one may not both eat and have, the foremost is that very taking part in a great occasion. All the fun of it is being got by the man who stays at home and reads the newspapers, undistracted by the press of practical matters in hand.

True, for the landing of General Pershing there was the color of soldiery, the blare of brass bands, the ring of great names among the welcomers. There was, of course, the overtone picture of a great chieftain, marching in advance of a great army, come to foreign lands to add their might to what, with their coming, was then a world in arms. The future might see, blended with the gray hulk of the *Baltic*, the shadowy shape of the *Mayflower* coming back, still carrying men bound to the service of world freedom.

But what they saw that morning was, after all, a very modern landing, from a very modern ship, with sailors hastily tying down a gang-plank, and doing it very well because they had done it just that way so many times before.

The Royal Welsh Fusiliers were down to give a military welcome, with their mascot and their crack band. The lord mayor, Lieutenant-General Pitcairn Campbell, Admiral Stileman, and other men from both arms of England's service were there, not to feel of their feelings, but to make the landing as agreeable and convenient as possible, and to convey to General Pershing, with Anglo-Saxon mannerliness and reticence, their great pleasure at having him come.

As soon as there was access to the ship General Campbell and Admiral Stileman went aboard and introduced themselves to General Pershing. They met, also, a few of the American staff-officers, and returned salutes from the privates who made up the Pershing entourage of 168 men.

There were congratulations on the ship's safe arrival, which reminded General Pershing and some of his officers that they wanted, before leaving the ship, to pay their respects to the skipper who had carried them through the danger zone without so much as a sniff at a submarine.

This done, the little company of officers walked down the gang-plank, talking cheerily of their satisfaction at meeting, of their hard work on the ship, of the weather, and what-not, all the while the soldiers on the decks behind them waved hands and handkerchiefs in a general overflow of well-being, and finally – set foot in England!

One may not go too far in describing the contents of a general's mind without some help from him, but it's a fair guess that if General Pershing is as kin to his kind as he seems to be, the very precise moment of this setting foot in England escaped his notice altogether, and was left free for the historian to embroider how he pleased. For General Pershing was in the act of being led to the salute of a guard of honor by General Campbell. And almost immediately after that precise moment the Welsh Fusiliers' band began the "Star-Spangled Banner," and again it's a good bet that General Pershing and his staff thought not a thing about England and a lot about home.

But so the historic moment came, and so it went. And presently the American vanguard was finding its places in the special train to London.

Perhaps England knew that a great hour was in the making, for her rolling green hills gave back the warmth of a splendid sun, and her hedgerows and wild blooms braved forth in crystal air. Those of the newcomers who saw England first that afternoon thanked their stars fervently that England and democracy were on the same side.

In mid-afternoon the train reached London, and here the Americans were greeted, not alone by soldiers and England, but by the English. The secret of their coming, carefully kept, had given the port civilians no chance. But they knew it in London and the station was crowded to its doors.

General Pershing stepped from the train as soon as it stopped. Ambassador Walter Hines Page came over to him, both hands outstretched, and asked leave to introduce another general who had taken an Expeditionary Force to France – General Sir John French. Other introductions followed – to Lord Derby, General Lord Brooke, and Sir Francis Lloyd. And there was a hearty handshake from a fighter who needed no introduction – Rear-Admiral William E. Sims.

Inside and outside the station the civilians cheered. None of them needed to have General Pershing pointed out to them. He was unmistakable. No man ever looked more the ordained leader of fighting men. He was tall, broad, and deep-chested, splendidly set up; and to the care with which Providence had fashioned him he had added soldierly care of his own.

He might have been patterned upon the Freudian dream of Julius Cæsar, if Julius was in truth the unsoldierly looking person they made him out to be, whose majesty lay wholly in his own mind's eye.

The gallant look of General Pershing fanned the London friendliness to contagious flames of enthusiasm. He and his officers were cheered to their hotel, the soldiers were cheered to their barracks in the Tower of London.

At the hotel they found three floors turned over to them, arranged for good, hard work, with plenty of desk-room, and boy and girl scouts for running errands. Squarely in the entrance was a money-changer's desk, with a patient man in charge who could, and did, name the number of cents to the shilling once every minute for four days. A little English lady who visited America complained bitterly, just after arrival, "Why didn't they make their dollar just four shillings?" thereby summing up the only really valid source of acrimony between England and America. The money-changer made the international amity complete.

Once installed, General Pershing and his staff fell to and worked, continuing the organization that had been roughly blocked out on the *Baltic*, and building up the liaison between English and American army procedure, begun by the help of British and Canadian officers on board, by frequent conferences with England's State, War, and Navy Departments.

The day after the arrival General Pershing went to "breakfast at Windsor," the first meeting between America's fighter and England's King. Here, at last, the momentousness of the matter found voice.

King George, having done with the introductory greeting, said earnestly: "I cannot tell you how much your coming means to me. It has been the great dream of my life that my country and yours would join in some great enterprise ... and here you are..."

After this visit, prolonged by an inspection of the historic treasures of Windsor Castle, General Pershing made the rule of unbroken work for himself and his officers till his task in London was finished and he should leave for France to join his First Division.

He made what he expected to be a single exception to this rule. He went to a dinner-party, at which he met Lloyd-George, Arthur Balfour, just back from his American mission, and half a dozen others of commensurate distinction. He found that his exception was no exception at all. The English do not merely have the reputation of doing their real work at their dinner-parties – they deserve that reputation. Staff-officers, telling all about it later on, said that it could hardly have been distinguished from a cabinet meeting, or a report from the Secretary of State for War. So were the final plans made and the business of the nations settled.

Concerning all these meetings and all the national feeling that was behind them, General Pershing and his officers were of one voice – that England's welcome had been precisely of the sort that pleased them most. It was reticent, charming, too genuine for much open expression, too chivalrous at heart to be obtrusive.

What with spending most of each twenty-four hours at work, the American vanguard finished up its affairs in four days. And early on the morning of June 13, long before the break of day, General Pershing and his officers and men boarded their Channel boat, the *Invicta*, and set sail for France.

CHAPTER II

"VIVE PAIR-SHANG!"

THE *Invicta* came into Boulogne harbor in the early morning, to find that her attempts at a secret crossing had amounted to nothing at all. Everybody within sight and ear-shot was out to show how pleased he was, riotously and openly, indifferent alike to the hopes of spy or censor.

The fishing-boats, the merchant coastwise fleet, the Channel ships and hordes of little privately owned sloops and yawls and motor-boats all plied chipperly around with "bannières étoilées" fore and aft. The sun was very bright and the water was very blue, and between them was that exhilarating air which always rises over the coasts of France, whenever and wherever you land on them, which not all the smoke and grime of the world's biggest war could deaden or destroy.

The *Invicta's* own flags were run up at the harbor mouth. Again the lines of khaki-colored soldiers formed behind the deck-rails, and again the chieftain from overseas stood at the prow of his ship and waited the coming of a historic moment.

When the *Invicta* was made fast and her gang-plank went over, there was a half-circle of space cleared in the quay in front of her by a detachment of grizzled French infantrymen, their horizon-blue uniforms filmed over with the yellow dust of a long march.

Behind the infantrymen the good citizens of Boulogne were yelling their throats dry. When General Pershing stopped for an instant's survey at the head of the gang-plank, with his staff-officers close behind him, the roar of welcome swelled to thunder and resounded out to sea. When he marched down and stepped to the quay, there was a sudden, arresting silence. Every soldier was at salute, and every civilian, too. In that tense instant a new world was beginning, and though it was as formless as all beginnings, the unerringly dramatic and sensitive French paid the tribute of silence to its birth. The future was to say that in that instant the world allied on new bases, that men now fought together not because their lands lay neighboring, or were jointly menaced by some central foe, but because they would follow their own ideal to wherever it was in danger. An American general had brought his fighters three thousand miles because a principle of world order and world right needed the added strength of his arms. And never before had American soldiers come in their uniforms to do battle on the continent of Europe.

The moment's silence ended as startlingly as it began. Bands and cheerers set in again on one beat. The officers who had come to make a formal welcome fell back and let the unprepared public uproar have way.

General Pershing and his officers walked through aisles strenuously forced by the infantrymen, to where carriages waited to carry them through the Boulogne streets.

It must have seemed to the little American contingent as if every Frenchman in France had come up to the coast for the celebration.

From the carriages the crowds stretched solid in every direction. The streets were blanketed under uncountable flags. Every window held its capacity of laughing and cheering Frenchwomen.

Children ran along the streets, shrilling "Vive l'Amérique!" and laughing hilariously when their flowers were caught by the grateful but embarrassed American officers.

When the special train to Paris had started the officers mopped their faces and settled back for a modest time. But they reckoned without their French. Not a town along the way missed its chance to greet the Americans. The stations were packed, the cheers were incessant, the roses poured in deluges into the train-windows.

But at the Gare du Nord, in Paris, the official French greeting was too magnificent to be pushed aside further by mere populace.

There were cordons of soldiers drawn up in the station, stiff at attention, making aisles by which the French officials could get to the Americans. There were officers in brilliant uniform, covered with medals for heroic service. There were massed bands, led by the Garde Republicaine. "Papa Joffre" was there, with his co-missioner, Viviani; Painleve, then Minister of War, and presently to have a while as Premier; General Foch, Marne hero, now generalissimo, and Ambassador William G. Sharp.

These, with General Pershing, Major Robert Bacon, a member of Pershing's staff and lately ambassador to France, and two or three other staff-officers, found open motor-cars waiting to drive them to the Hotel Crillon, on the Place de la Concorde, the temporary American headquarters.

Dense crowds of soldiers patrolled the streets leading down to the Grand Boulevards, through which the distinguished little procession was to take its way, and other soldiers lined up at attention in the boulevards.

Paris turned loose, with her heart in her mouth and her enthusiasm at red heat, is not easily forgotten. On this June day her raptures were immemorial. They were of a sort to call out the old-timers for standards of comparison.

Every sentence now spoken in France begins either "Avant la guerre" or "Depuis la guerre." Nobody can ignore the fact that with August, 1914, the whole of life changed. To the old-timers who wanted to tell you what Paris was like the afternoon Pershing arrived, there were only two occasions possible, both "Depuis la guerre."

The first great day was that following the order for general mobilization, when exaltation, defiance, threat, and frenzy packed the national spirit to suffocation, and when the streets flowed with unending streams of grim but undaunted people. Tragic days and relief days followed. But the next great time, when tragedy did not outweigh every other feeling, was that 14th of July, 1916, when the military parades were begun again, for the first time since the war, and in the line of march were detachments from the armies of all the Allies.

The third great French war festival was for Pershing. The crowds were literally everywhere. The streets through which the motors passed were tightly blocked except for the little road cleared by the soldiers. The streets giving off these were jammed solid. American flags were in every window, on every lamp-post, on every taxicab, and in every wildly waving hand.

Although the soldiers could force a way open before the motor-cars, no human agency could keep the way free behind them. The Parisians wanted not merely to see Pershing – they wanted to march with him. So they fell in, tramping the boulevards close behind the cars, cheering and singing to their marching step.

Only when General Pershing disappeared under the arched doorway of the Hotel Crillon, and let it be known that he had other gear to tend, did the city in procession break apart and go about its several private celebrations.

But all that afternoon and all that night, wherever men and women collected, or children were underfoot, it was "Vive l'Amérique" and "Vive le Generale Pair-shang" that echoed when the glasses rose.

When General Pershing, after the tremendous experience of his European landing, asked for the quiet and shelter of his own quarters at the Crillon, his intention was that his retirement should be complete. He said flatly that a man who had just witnessed such a tribute to his country as Paris had made that afternoon was no better than he should be if he did not feel the need of solitude.

But the inevitable aftermath of the great event the world over is the talking with the newspapers. And sure enough, no sooner was General Pershing safe in his retreat than the Paris reporters were knocking at the door. The American correspondents who had travelled over from London on the *Invicta* had had emphatic instructions to stay away, story or no story. But one distinguished Frenchman broke the rules, and to François de Jessen, of *Le Temps*, General Pershing did finally give a statement. How reluctantly one may see from the statement's contents.

"I came to Europe to organize the participation of our army in this immense conflict of free nations against the enemies of liberty, and not to deliver fine speeches at banquets, or have them published in the newspapers," said General Pershing. "Besides, that is not my business, and, you know, we Americans, soldiers and civilians, like not only to appear, but to be, businesslike. However, since you offer me an opportunity to speak to France, I am glad to make you a short and simple confession.

"As a man and as a soldier I am profoundly happy over, indeed proud of, the high mission with which I am charged. But all this is purely personal, and might appear out of proportion with the solemnity of the hour and the gravity of events now occurring. If I have thought it proper to indulge in this confidence, it is because I wish to express my admiration of the French soldier, and at the same time to express my pride in being at the side of the French and allied armies.

"It is much more important, I think, to announce that we are the precursors of an army that is firmly resolved to do its part on the Continent for the cause the American nation has adopted as its own. We come conscious of the historic duty to be performed when our flag shows itself upon the battle-fields of the world. It is not my role to promise or to prophesy. Let it suffice to tell you that we know what we are doing, and what we want."

Two rememberable experiences waited the next day for General Pershing. The first was his visit to des Invalides, the tomb of Napoleon; the second, his appearance in the French Chamber of Deputies. If he had known what it was to be the hero of all Paris at once, he was to learn how special groups regarded him, and what the French highest-in-command thought fitting for America's leader.

At all of General Pershing's appearances in Paris in these first days a detachment of soldiers had to be constantly before him, widening a way for him through the crowds that waited his coming. On the morning of his visit to the tomb of Napoleon the broad Champs de Mars, in front of des Invalides, was impassable except by the soldiers' flying wedge. Shouts in French rang out steadily as he made his way toward des Invalides' entrances, and suddenly a man cried, in accented English: "Behind him there are ten million more."

But once inside des Invalides General Pershing was alone with General Niox, who was in charge of the famous treasure building, and General Joffre. Between Pershing and Joffre there had begun one of those intense friendships that form too impetuously for ordinary explanation. It was full-grown at the end of their first meeting, a matter of seconds. And though at this time their friendly intercourse was halted sometimes by the fact that neither spoke the other's language, they were continually together.

So it was General Joffre who walked beside him when General Pershing followed General Niox down to the entrance of the crypt, and stood before the door. All the world may go to this door, if its behavior is good, but only royal applicants may go beyond it.

General Pershing was to go inside. General Niox handed him the great key, then turned away with Joffre, while Pershing, after a moment's hesitation, fitted the key and crossed the threshold. When he came out again he was taken to see the Napoleonic relics, which lay in rows in their glass cases. Two of them, the great sword and the Grand Cross cordon of the Legion of Honor, had never been touched since the time of Louis Philippe. As Pershing and Joffre bent over them General Niox came to a momentous decision. He opened the cases and handed the two to General Pershing. France could do no more.

Pershing held them for a moment and nobody spoke. Then he handed back the cordon, kissed the sword-hilt and presented it, and in profound silence the three men left the treasure hall.

Between this visit and that to the Chamber of Deputies there were many official calls, including one to President Poincaré at the Elysée Palace, which ended in a formal luncheon to Pershing by President and Madame Poincaré, with most of the important men of France as fellow guests.

General Pershing was recognized as he entered the gallery of the Chamber of Deputies, and all other business except that of doing him honor was promptly put by. Full-throated cheering began and would not die down. Finally Premier Ribot commenced to speak, and the deputies stopped to listen.

"The people of France fully understand the deep significance of the arrival of General Pershing in France," he said. "It is one of the greatest events in history that the people of the United States should come here to struggle, not in the spirit of ambition or conquest, but for the noble ideals of justice and liberty. The arrival of General Pershing is a new message from President Wilson which, if that is possible, surpasses in nobility all those preceding it."

And Viviani said, a few minutes later: "President Wilson holds in his hand all the historic grandeur of America, which he now puts forth in this fraternal union extended to us by the Great Republic."

These two speeches opened a flood-gate. Long after the cheering deputies had said their good-bys to General Pershing, the French writers, made articulate by the example of Ribot and Viviani, were busily preparing appreciations and commentaries of the Pershing arrival. The most picturesque of these was Maurice de Waleffe's, in *Le Journal*: "'There are no longer any Pyrenees,' said Louis XIV, when he married a Spanish princess. 'There is no longer an ocean,' General Pershing might say, with greater justice, as he is about to mingle with ours the democratic blood of his soldiers. The fusion of Europe and America is an enormous fact to note."

A more powerful speech was that of Clemenceau, now Premier of France, but then an earnest private citizen, writing for his paper. "Paris has given its finest welcome to General Pershing," he wrote. "We are justified. We are justified in hoping that the acclamation of our fellow citizens, with whom are mingled crowds of soldiers home on leave, have shown him clearly, right at the start, in what spirit we are waging the bloodiest of wars; with what invincible determination, never to falter in any fibre of our nerves or muscles. Unless I misjudge America, General Pershing, fully conscious of the importance of his mission, has received from the cordial and joyous enthusiasm of the Parisians that kind of fraternal encouragement which is never superfluous, even when one needs it not."

"Let him have no doubt that he, too, has brought encouragement to us, the whole of France, that followed with its eyes the whole of his passage along the boulevards; to all our hearts that salute his coming with joy at the supreme grandeur of America's might enrolled under the standard of right."

"This idea M. Viviani, just back from America, splendidly developed in his eloquent speech to the Chamber of Deputies in the presence of General Pershing."

"General Pershing himself, less dramatic, has given us, in three phrases devoid of artificiality, an impression of exceptionally virile force. It was no rhetoric but the pure simplicity of the soldier who is here to act, and who fears to promise more than he can perform. No bad sign, this, for those of us who have grown weary of pompous words, when we must pay so dearly for each failure of performance."

"Not long ago the Germans laughed at the 'contemptible English Army,' and we hear now that they regard the American Army as 'too ridiculous for words.' Well, the British have taught even Hindenburg himself what virile force can do toward filling gaps in organization. Now the arrival of Pershing brings Hindenburg news that the Americans are setting to work in their turn – those Americans whose performance in the War of Secession showed them capable of such 'improvisation of war' as the world had never seen – and I think the Kaiser must be beginning to wonder whether he has not trusted rather blindly in his 'German tribal God.' He has loosed the lion from its cage, and now he finds that the lion has teeth and claws to rend him."

"The Kaiser had given us but a few weeks in which to realize that the success of his submarine campaign would impose the silence of terror on the human conscience throughout the world. Well, painful as he must find it, Pershing's arrival, with its consequent military action, cannot fail to prove to him that, after all, the moral forces he ignored must always be taken into account in forecasting human probabilities. Those learned Boches have yet to understand that in the course of his intellectual evolution, man has achieved the setting of moral right above brute force; that might is taking its stand beside right, to accomplish the greatest revolution in the history of mankind. That is the lesson which Pershing's coming has taught us, and that is why we rejoice."

But even while the commentators were at their task General Pershing had left off celebrating and got to work. The First Division was on the seas.

A few very important persons in France and America knew where they were to land, and when, but nobody in the world knew just what was to be done for and with them once they landed, for the plans did not even exist. It was the business of the general and his staff to create them. And they say that the amount of work done in those first days in France was incredible even to them when they looked back on it.

As a first step American headquarters were installed in 31 Rue Constantine, a broad, shaded street near the Hôtel des Invalides, overlooking the Champs de Mars. The house had belonged once to a prodigiously popular Paris actress, and it was correspondingly magnificent.

But the magnificence, except that which was inalienably in space and structure, was banished by the busy Americans. In the hallway they stretched a plank railing, behind which American private soldiers asked and answered questions. Under the once sumptuous stairway there were stacks of army cots. The walls were bulletined and covered with directions carefully done in two languages. The chief of the Intelligence Section had the ex-dining-room, and the adjutant-general had the ballroom on the second floor. Even so, it was not long before this spaciousness was insufficient, and the headquarters brimmed over into No. 27 as well.

It was in these two houses that the whole army organization was plotted out, and General Pershing made good his prediction that the Americans would not merely seem, but would be, businesslike.

After ten days or so of beaver-like absorption in their jobs the American headquarters announced to the war correspondents that they must take a certain train at a certain hour, under the guidance of Major Frederick Palmer, press officer and censor, to a certain port in France. There, at a certain moment, they would see what they would see.

CHAPTER III

THE FIRST DIVISION LANDS

THEY saw the gray troop-ships steaming majestically into the middle distance from the gray of the open sea, with the little convoy fleet alongside. It was a gray morning, and at first the ships were hardly more than nebulous patches of a deeper tone than sea and sky. As they neared the port, and took on outline, the watchers increased, and took on internationalism.

The Americans, who had come to see this consequential landing, some in uniform and some civilians, had arrived in the very early morning, before the inhabitants of the little seaport town were up and about, let alone aware of what an event was that day to put them into the history books.

But it never takes a French civilian long to discover that something is afoot – what with three years of big happenings to sharpen his wits and keep him on the lookout.

At the front of the quay were Americans two deep, straining to make out the incoming ships, on tiptoe to count their number, breathless to shout a welcome to the first "Old Glory" to be let loose to the harbor winds. Forming rapidly behind the Americans were French men, French women, and French children, indifferent to affairs, kitchens, or schools, chattering that "Mais surement, c' sont les Américains – regardez, regardez!.."

Ignominiously in the rear, but watching too, were the German prisoners who worked, in theory at least, at transferring rails from inconvenient places to convenient ones for the loading of coaster steamers. They said little enough, having learned that a respectful hearing was not to be their lot for a while. But they moved fewer rails than ever, and nobody bothered to speed them up.

The great ships came in slowly. Before long, the watchers could see lines of dull yellow banding the gray hulks, and then the yellow lines took on form and separateness, and were visible one soldier at a time.

Last, one ship steamed apart from the others and made direct for the quay, and the solemn business of landing American troops on French soil was about to begin.

There was to be a certain ceremony for the landing, but, like all the ceremonies conceded to these great occasions by the American Army, it was to be of extreme simplicity. When they were near enough to the quay to be heard, the transport band played "The Star-Spangled Banner," while all the soldiers stood at salute, and then they played the "Marseillaise," while everybody on ship and shore stood at salute. With that, they called it a morning, as far as celebration was concerned, and to the accompaniment of a great deal of talk and a volley of light-hearted questions, they began to disembark.

The first question, called from some distance away, was: "What place is this?" The next was, "Do they let the enlisted men drink in the saloons over here?" and there was a miscellany about apple pie and doughnuts, cigarettes, etc. And very briefly after the first soldiers were ashore nothing could be heard but "Don't they speak any English at all?"

The outstanding impression of that morning may be what it will to the French civilians, to the American newspaper correspondents, and to the officers both ashore and on board. To the privates of the First Division it will always be the incomprehensible nonsense that goes by the name of the French language, spoken with perfect assurance by people old enough to know better, who refuse to make one syllable of intelligible sound in answer to even the simplest requests.

The privates were prepared to hear the French speak their own language at mention of Alsace-Lorraine and war aims, or to propound their private philosophies that way. They granted the right of the French to talk how they pleased of their emotional pleasure at seeing the troops, or of any other subject above the timber-line.

What staggered them was the insane top-loftiness of using French to ask for ham and eggs, and beer, or the way to camp. For nothing, not volumes of warning before they left home, nor interminable hours of French-grammar instruction on board the troop-ships, had really got it deep inside the American private's head that French was not an accomplishment to be used as evidence of cosmopolitan culture, but a mere prosy necessity, without which daily existence was a nightmare and a frustration.

The French, on their side, were helpless enough, but not so bewildered. They had lived too long, in peace as well as war, across a narrow channel from that stanch English-speaking race who brought both their tea and their language with them to France and everywhere else, to be dumfounded that strangers should balk at their foreign tongue.

The inevitable result was that here, in their first contact with the French, as later, throughout the fighting areas, the American soldiers learned to understand French-English long before they could speak a decent word of French.

Fortunately for the First Division, it had had some able bilingual forerunners at the seaport town where they landed. The camps had been built by the French, a few miles back from the town, but a few of the housekeeping necessities had been installed by General Pershing's staff-officers, and signs in good, plain English showed the proper roads. And as the single files of soldiers began to descend the gang-plank of the first transport, and to form for marching to camp, their own officers were having some compact instruction from the staff-officers on how to get to camp and what to do when they got there.

There was no waste motion about getting the troops under way. The first companies were tramp-tramping up the streets before the last companies were overside, and the first transport was free to go back and give place to the next one before the mayor had got his red sash and gilt chains in place and arrived to do them suitable honor.

So, while the shore watchers fell back into safe observation-posts, the soldiers clattered down through the quay-sheds to the little street, formed and swung away, and one ship after another disgorged its passengers, and presently the sheds were overrun with the blue-clad sailors from the convoys.

All that day, the soldiers marched through the town. Their camps lay at the end of a long white shore road, and jobs were not wanting when they got there. Their pace was easy, because of these things, and they probably would not have put out any French eye with their flawless marching, even under less indulgent circumstances. For this First Division was recruited in a hurry, and most of their real training lay ahead of them.

Where they were impressive was in their composite build. There were little fellows among them, but they straggled at the back. The major part of the soldiers were tall, thin, rangy-looking, with a march that was more lope than anything else and a look of heaving their packs along without much effort. They fell about midway between the thin, breedy look of the first English troops in France and the stocky, thick-necked sort that came later.

The marines were the pick of the lot, for size and behavior too. The sense of being something special was with the marines from the first. They marched that way. And, set apart by their olive drab as well as by their size and comportment, they gave that First Division's first march in France a quality of real distinction. And when the army got to its first French camps, the welcome sight its eyes first fell upon was that of already arrived marines carrying water down the hill.

The camps were long wooden buildings, rather above the average, as became the status of the visitors, built almost at the top of a hill, looking down over green fields and round trees to the three or four villages within range of vision, and beyond them to the sea.

Some supplies were there already, but the soldiers had had to bring most of their first supper, and the camp-cooks had their own troubles getting things just so.

Major-General Sibert, field commander of the First Division, had quarters at camp, so that excuses were not in order. Even for that first supper, the marines and all others they could commandeer to help them were rushing about preparing things to the very top of their bent. Nobody had town-leave for the first day or two, till things were in apple-pie order, and the camp was in line to shelter and feed its soldiers for as long as it should be necessary to stay there.

If camp life was busy these days, the town life was no less so. The chief hotel, wherein much red plush met the eye from the very entrance, was swarming with officers of both nations and all degrees of rank. General Pershing was there, with his aides and most of his staff. Admirals were there, changing uniforms from blue to white and back again as the erratic French weather dictated.

There were half a dozen high officers from the French Army, making both formal and informal welcomes, and there were more busy majors and captains and more interpreters than you could count in half a day's time.

The little Frenchwoman who sat behind the desk was amiable to the best of her very considerable ability, but the questions she had to answer, whether she understood them or not, would have addled an older head than hers. She could run her hotel with the best of them, but when perfectly sane-looking young officers asked her where to buy five thousand cups and saucers, and paper napkins by the ton, she said in so many words that an American invasion was worse than bedlam.

The hotel's second floor was the favored place for conferences. There a fair welter of red plush was drawn up around a big table in the hallway, and livid red wall-paper added its warmth to a scene which against a plank wall would not have lacked color.

At this table General Pershing could have been found much of the time. The whole practical liaison of French and American Armies was contrived here, though the first rule for this consolidation laid down by a grizzled French general with but one arm left, was that "there was no longer anything that was French, or anything that was American, but merely all we had that was 'ours,'" so that the task was one of detail only.

Though the daytimes were packed with work, most of the officers called it a day at sunset. Then the little hotel took on its most engaging color. The little French piano tinkled out in the warm air with an accompaniment of many voices. Once a very blue young second lieutenant chose to express his mood by repetitions without number of the melancholy "Warum?" – probably the first German music that had been heard from that piano for many a moon. Possibly those of the French who knew what the tune was recognized also that America had turned a point in more ways than one in coming to France, not least among them being making good American soldiers out of erstwhile good Germans. Nobody seemed much astonished or put out when within the day a goodly number of American soldiers were speaking to German prisoners in their own language, though talking to the German prisoners, aside from the fact that it was not encouraged by the French, turned out to be indifferent fun, since the American soldiers had had their fill of German propaganda before they left home, and none of the prisoners was overmodest as to what Germany was or would do.

The cafés out-of-doors were overflowing with Americans, too. It was plenty of fun to hear the sailors scolding the French waitresses for calling lemons "limons," and trying to overhaul the French pronunciation of "bière" to something approaching a compromise.

An officer came along and broke up a crap-game. The soldiers forgave him, but the civilians did not. It was their first go at the game, and they wanted a lot of teaching.

The lone bookstore of the town made the only known effort to get the Americans what they asked for, instead of trying to prevail on them to adopt something French. They sent, perhaps to Paris, to get English books, and they piled their windows high with Macaulay's "History of England" and Bacon's "Essays."

The paper-buying habit is ingrown in the American male. He has three newspapers under his arm before any afternoon is what it should be. And so the soldiers bought the French papers, two and three at a time, and carried them around.

Any time of day or night, a look out into the town's main street descried a company or two of soldiers, on their way from camp for town-leave, or on their way back. They marched continually. The motor-cycle with the side-seat, which was later to be the distinguishing mark of the American Army in Paris, made its appearance in the seaport within a day or two of the first transport's landing, and eased the burdens of the French motor-lorries with which the American supplies had been taken to camp, owing to a delay of the First Division's own lorries, on a slow ship.

And most successful sensation of all, the army mule. The French knew him slightly, because their own army used him on occasion. But no Frenchman could speak to a mule in his own language as these big mule-tenders did.

It was exalting to watch the army on the march, to see the marines and the profusion of slim sailors. But the real crowd always gathered around the big negro stevedores in long navy-blue coats, scarlet-lined, with brass buttons all the way up the front, over and down the back – likely a thrifty hand-me-down from pre-khaki days – who marched with perfect knowledge of their magnificence.

The stevedores, for their part, were as amazed as the French, though on a different score. They accepted with due resignation the fact that the French spoke French. It was when they first saw a Senegalese in French uniform, triple-black with tropic suns, but to them a mere one of themselves, and when they hailed him gladly in their English tongue, to ask which road to take, that his indecipherable French answer broke them, heart and spirit alike.

"Dat one blame stuck-up nigger," said the spokesman, as they trudged their way onward, none the wiser if the Senegalese, in his turn, had been rebuking them in French for showing off their English.

So, in its several aspects, the First Division made its impact upon France, jostled itself a little and the French more, and finally settled down to its short wait at the coast before going inland, "within sound of the guns," to get its training.

And because the camps were to be used many times again by other divisions to come on the "bridge of ships," the first had to put in some extra licks to make their camp conveniences permanent.

They played a few baseball-games, and they were encouraged to do a lot of swimming, in the off afternoon hours. After a bit town-leave was heavily curtailed, but there was a dispensation now and then for a "movie." In the main they kept their noses to the grindstone.

After a little while the men who were to march in Paris on the Fourth of July were selected, and, preceded by a few sailors with fewer duties and longer indulgences, they entrained on the late afternoon of July 2. There was no measuring the disappointment of the ones who were left behind, for the prediction that there would be doings in Paris on the first French Fourth of July was to be fulfilled to the letter.

But the housekeepers of the army could not be spared for celebrations. As soon as the marines could be despatched from the seaport they were sent direct across France to the points behind the lines where their training-camps were in waiting, and there, within a few weeks, the First Division reassembled and fell to work.

Meanwhile, of the doings in Paris —

CHAPTER IV

THE FOURTH OF JULY

THE first they knew of it in Paris – barring vague promises of "something to remember" on the American fête that had appeared in modest items in the newspapers – was when a motor-bus, jammed to the guards with American soldiers, suddenly rolled into the Avenue de l'Opéra from the Tuileries Gardens, and paraded up that august thoroughfare to the tune of incredible yelling from everybody on board. It was the afternoon of July 3.

A few picked Americans had known about it. A sufficient number of American and French officers and the newspaper correspondents had been told to appear at Austerlitz Station in the early morning of the 3d, and there they had seen the soldiers not merely arrive but tackle their first continental breakfast.

Neither was a sensation to be sneezed at. The soldiers were of the very finest, and in spite of their overnight journey they were all looking fit. They were anxious to fall right out of the train into the middle of Paris. To most of them it was a city of gallant and delightful scandal, filled even in war-time with that twinkle of gayety plus wickedness that is so intriguing when told about in Oscaloosa, behind the hand or the door. They said outright that they expected to see the post-cards all come to life when they set eyes first on Paris streets.

But even if Paris had had these fascinations in store, they were not for the soldiers that morning. Instead military precision, discipline, an orderly march to near-by barracks, and – a French breakfast: coffee and war-bread. Not even the French had a kind word for the war-bread, and no American ever spoke well of the coffee. But there it was – chronologically in order, and haply the worst of a Paris visit all over at once.

And most of the soldiers stayed right in barracks till it was time for the great processional the next day. It was a picked bunch that had the motor ride and informed Paris that they had come for a party. And if they didn't see the ladies with the unbehaving eyes, they did see the Louvre and the Tuileries, the Opéra, the boulevards, and the Madeleine. And Paris saw the soldiers.

There was no end of cheering and handclapping. The American flags that had been flying for Pershing were brought out again, and venders appeared on the streets with all manner of emblems to sell. It was one of those cheerful afternoons when good feeling expresses itself gently, reserving its hurrahs for the coming event.

The soldiers were kept on the cars, but now and then a good Parisian threw them a package of cigarettes or a flower. All told, they touched off the fuse timed to explode on the morrow, and, having done that, went back to barracks.

The first "Fourth" in Paris was a thoroughly whole-souled celebration. The French began it, civilians and soldiers, by taking a band around to serenade General Pershing the first thing in the morning. His house was on the left bank of the Seine, not far from American headquarters in the Rue Constantine, an historic old place with little stone balconies outside the upper windows.

On one of these General Pershing appeared, with the first notes of the band. He was cheered and cheered again. A little boy who had somehow climbed to the top of a gas street-lamp squealed boastfully to Pershing: "See, I am an American, too, for I have a sky-scraper!" (J'ai un gratte-ciel!) And with a wave of his hand General Pershing acknowledged his compatriot.

It was in this crowd around Pershing's house that a riot started, because a man who was being unpleasantly jostled said: "Oh, do leave me in peace." Those nearest him good-naturedly tried to give him elbow-room, but those a little distance away caught merely the "peace" of his ejaculation and, with sudden loud cries of "kill the pacifist," made for the unfortunate, and pommelled him roundly before the matter could be explained.

After the serenade and General Pershing's little speech of thanks the band, with most of the crowd following, marched over to des Invalides, the appointed place for the formal ceremony.

Around the ancient hotel, overflowing into the broad boulevards that radiate from it, and packing to suffocation the Champs de Mars in front of it, there were just as many Frenchmen as could stand shoulder to shoulder and chin to back. Inside, where there were speeches and exchanges of national emblems, the crowd was equally dense, in spite of the fact that only the very important or the very cunning had cards of admission.

The real Fourth celebration was in the streets. The waiting crowds yelled thunderously when the first band appeared, heralding the parade. Then came the Territorials, the escort troops, in their familiar horizon-blue. Then more bands, then officers, mounted and in motor-cars, and, finally, the Americans, manifestly having the proudest moment of their lives.

They were to march from des Invalides to Picpus Cemetery, the little private cemetery outside of Paris, where the Marquis de Lafayette is buried.

They crossed Solferino bridge, and made their way through a terrific crowd in the broad Place de la Concorde. The Paris newspapers, boasting of their conservatism, said there were easily one million Parisians that day within sight of des Invalides when the American soldiers left the building and started on their march.

To hear the soldiers tell it, there were easily one million Parisians, all under the age of ten, immediately under their feet before they had marched a mile.

From a balcony of the Hotel Crillon, on the north side of the Place de la Concorde, the marching Americans were wholly lost to view from the waist down. Nobody could ever complain of the French birth-rate after seeing that parade. Nobody ever saw that many children before in any one assemblage in France. It was prodigious.

And the French youngsters had their own notions of how they were to take part in that French Fourth of July. The main notion was to walk between the soldiers' legs. They were massed thick beside the soldiers, thick between them, impeding their knee action, terrorizing their steps. At a little distance, they looked like batter in a waffle-pan. But they did what they could to make the American soldiers feel among friends that day, and nobody could say they failed.

The parade turned along the picturesque old Rue de Rivoli on leaving the Place de la Concorde, and filed along the river, almost the length of the city. They had not gone far before the Frenchwomen had thrown them enough roses to decorate bayonets and hats and a few lapels. They made a brave sight, brave to nobility. And though they were harassed by the eager children, abashed by the women, and touched to genuine emotion by the whole city, they wouldn't have grudged five years of their lives for the privilege of being there.

At Picpus, the scene made up in intensiveness what it lacked in breadth, for the cemetery is far too small to permit of a crowd of size. A home for aged gentlewomen overlooks one wall ... its windows were filled, and their occupants proved that Frenchwomen are never too old or too gentle to throw roses. A military hospital overlooks another side, and balconies and windows were crowded with "blessés." The few officers and civilians who had access to the cemetery-grounds made their commemoration brief and simple. It was there that Colonel Stanton made the little speech which buzzed around the Allied world within the day: "Lafayette, nous voilà!" – "Lafayette, we're here!" Its felicity of phrase moved the French scribes to columns of congratulation. Its compactness won the Americans. Everybody said it was the best war speech made in France, and it was.

After Picpus, the officers came back to the city for work, and the soldiers went to barracks. The sailors were allowed to saunter about the city, in vain search for the post-card ladies and the flying champagne corks. The soldiers were on a sterner régime.

Early on the morning of the 5th, they were eastward bound, to join the rest of the First Division for training, and Paris saw the last of the American soldiers.

A few had leave, within the next few months, from engineering corps and base hospitals. But the infantrymen and the marines were over learning lessons in the war of trench and bayonet, and by Christmas even the scattering leaves from behind the lines were discontinued, and Americans on holiday bent were sent to Aix-les-Bains. Even officers had little or no Paris leave, and those who had been quartered in Paris, in the Rue Constantine and the Rue Sainte-Anne, were collected at the new American headquarters, southeast of Paris. The American uniform all but vanished off the Paris streets. The French national holiday, ten days after the American, had no American contingent.

So Paris and the American Army had a quick acquaintance, a brilliant one and a brief one. It was mainly between the beginning and the end of that Fourth of July. It will quite probably not be renewed till the end of the war. Lucky the onlooker who sees the reunion. For then it may be wagered that there will be gayety enough to answer the needs of even the most post-card-haunted soldier.

But to get on to the training-camps —

CHAPTER V

WHAT THEY LIVED IN

THE American training-camp area spread over many miles and through many villages. It had boundaries only in theory, because all its sides were ready to swing farther north, east, south, and west at a day's notice, whenever the Expeditionary Force should become army enough to require it.

But its focus was in the Vosges, in the six or seven villages set apart from the beginning for the Americans, and as such, overhauled by those first marines and quartermaster's assistants who left the coast in early July and moved campward.

This overhauling brought the end of the Franco-American honeymoon. Later, amity was to be re-established, but when the first marine ordered the first manure-pile out of the first front yard, a breach began which it took long months to heal.

There were few barracks in the Vosges. The soldiers were to be billeted with the peasants. And the marines said the peasants had to clean up and air, and the peasants said the marines were insane.

Those first days at training-camp, before the body of the troops arrived, were circus enough for anybody.

Six villages were to be got ready, the officers to have the pick of places, and the privates to have next best. And the choice of assignments for officers was still so far from ideal as to make the house-cleaning a thorough job all around.

The marines had a village to themselves, the farthest from the inspection-grounds. The correspondents had a village to themselves, too, though it wasn't because there was any excess of regard for the importance of the correspondents among the men who laid out the grounds. They were put where they could do the least harm, and where their confusing appearance, in Sam Brown belts and other officer-like insignia, would not exact too many wasted salutes.

General Headquarters was still in Paris at this time, but General Sibert had Field Headquarters at camp, and though his assignment was relatively stylish, it could not have been said to offend him with its luxury.

He lived and worked in a little frame building in the main street of the central village, which had probably once been a hotel.

It was to be recognized by the four soldiers always at attention outside it, whenever motors or pedestrians passed that way. Two of the soldiers were American and two were French.

Although all the American training-camp area became America as to jurisdiction, as soon as the troops moved there, the French soldiers were always present around headquarters, partly to help and partly to register politeness.

Inside Field Headquarters, the little bare wooden rooms were stripped of their few battered vases and old chromos, and plain wooden tables and chairs were set about. The marines opened the windows, and scrubbed up the floors, and hung out the sign of "Business as usual," and General Sibert moved in.

The rest was not so easy. The various kitchens came in first for attention. For many days French and American motor-lorries had been trundling across France, storing the warehouses with heaping piles of food-supplies. The procession practically never stopped. Trains brought what could be put aboard them, but it was to motors that most of the real work fell. So the thin, long line of loaded cars stretched endlessly from coast to camp, and finally everything was attended to but where to put the food and where to cook it.

The houses with the good back sheds were picked for kitchens, and the big army soup-kettles were bricked into place, and what passed for ovens were provided for the bakers.

For bathing facilities, there were neat paths marked to the river. That is, the French called it a river. Every American who rides through France for the first time has the same experience: he looks out of his train-window and remarks to his companion, who knows France well: "Isn't that a pretty little creek? Are there many springs about here?" And the companion replies scornfully: "That isn't a creek – that's the Marne River," or "That's the Aisne," or "That's the Meuse." The American always wonders what the French would call the Hudson.

It was one of these storied streams that ran through the American training-camp, in which the Americans did their bathing. Whenever a soldier wanted to get his head wet he waded across.

Later, when the camps were filled, these river-banks were to offer a remarkable sight to the French peasants, who thought all Americans were bathing-mad anyway. Hundreds of soldiers, in the assorted postures of men scrubbing backs and knees and elbows, disported with soap and wash-cloth along the banks. Hundreds of others, swimming their suds off, flashed here an arm and there a leg in the stream itself. It did not take much distance to make them look like figures on a frieze, a new Olympic group. Modesty knew them not, but there were not supposed to be women about, and the peasants had a nice Japanese point of view in the matter. At any rate, there was the training-camp bathtub, and they used it at least once a day, to the unending stupefaction of the French.

Where they slept was another matter, suggesting neither Corot nor Phidias.

The privates had houses first, then barns. The barns were freed of the live stock, which was turned into meadows to graze, and the floors were dug down to clean earth, and vast quantities of formaldehyde were sprayed around. Then the cots were carried up to the second floors of the barns and put along in tidy rows. At the foot of each soldier's bed was whatever manner of small wooden box he could corral from the quartermaster, and there he kept all he owned. His pack unfolded its contents into the box, and his comfort-kit perched on the top. And there he kept the little mess of treasures he bought from the gypsy wagons that rode all day around the outskirts of the camp.

Windows were knocked out, just under the eaves, for the fresh air that seemed, so inexplicably to the French, so essential to the Americans.

Even with the First Division, acknowledged to be about the smallest expeditionary force known to the Great War, the soldiers averaged a little over two thousand to the village, and since not one of the villages had more than four or five hundred population in peace-times, the troubles of the man who arranged the billets were far from light.

Fortunately, the First Division did not ask for luxuries. Even the officers spent more time in simplifying their quarters than in trimming them up. The colonel of one regiment – one of those who became major-generals soon after the arrival in France – had his quarters in an aristocratic old house, set back in a long yard, where plum-trees dropped their red fruit in the vivid green grass and roses overgrew their confines – it was the sort of house before which the pre-war motor tourists used to stop and breathe long "ohs" of satisfaction.

The entrance was by a low, arched doorway. The hall was built of beautifully grained woods, old and mellow of tone. The stairway was broad and easy to climb. The colonel had the second floor front, just level with the tree-tops.

In the room there were rich woods and tapestried walls, and at the back was a four-poster mahogany bed with heavy satin hangings, brocaded with fleur-de-lis. The Pompadour would have been entirely happy there. But the American colonel had done things to it – things that would have popped the eyes out of the Pompadour's head. He pinned up the four-poster hangings with a safety-pin, that being the only way he could convey to his amiable little French servant-girl that he didn't want that bed turned down for him of nights. And he had taken all the satin hangings down from the windows. Under these windows he had drawn up a little board table and an army cot. Beside the table was his little army trunk. The space he used did not measure more than ten feet in any direction, and his luxuries waited unmolested for some more sybaritic soul than he.

A major in that same village who had had a cavalry command before the cavalry, as he put it, became "mere messengers," picked his quarters out himself, on the strength of all he had heard about "Sunny France." His house was nothing much, but behind it was a garden – a long garden, filled with vegetables, decorated with roses, shaded by fruit-trees. At the far end of the garden was a summer-house, in a circle of trees. Here the major took his first guests and showed how he intended to do his work in the open air, while the famous French sunshine flooded his garden and warmed his little refuge.

The one thing it will never be safe to say to any veteran of the First Division is "Sunny France." The summer of 1917, after a blazing start in June, settled down to drizzle and mist, cold and fog, rain that soaked to the marrow.

The major with the garden sloshed around the whole summer, visiting men who had settled indoors and had fireplaces. By the time the warmth had come back to his summer-house it was time for him to go up to the battle-line, and the man who writes a history of the billets in France will get a lot of help from him.

Some of the makeshifts of this first invasion were excusable and inevitable. Some were not. After the first two or three weeks of settling in, General Pershing made a tour of inspection, and some of the things he said about what he saw didn't make good listening. But after that visit all possible defects were overcome, and the men slept well, ate well, were as well clothed as possible, and were admirably sanitized.

The drinking-water was a matter for the greatest strictness. The French never drink water on any provocation, so that water provisions began from the ground up.

It was drawn into great skins and hung on tripods in the shaded parts of the billets, and it was then treated with a germicide, tasteless fortunately, carried in little glass capsules. This was a legacy from experiences in Panama.

Each man had his own tin cup, and when he got thirsty he went down and turned the faucet in the hanging skin tank. If he drank any other water he repented in the guard-house.

So, though the billets were rude and sometimes uncomfortable, the soldiers did stay in them and out of the hospitals.

And there were compensations.

Half of these were in play-times, and half in work-times. The training, slow at first, speeded up afterward and, with the help of the "Blue Devils" who trained with the Americans, took on all the exhilaration of war with none of its dangers. But how they trained doesn't belong in a chapter on billets. How they played is more suitable.

Three-fourths of their playing they did with the French children. The insurmountable French language, which kept doughboys and poilus at arm's length in spite of their best intentions, broke down with the youngsters.

It was one of the finest sights around the camp to see the big soldiers collecting around the mess-tent after supper, in the daylight-saving long twilight, to hear the band and play in pantomime with the hundreds of children who tagged constantly after them.

The band concerts were a regular evening affair, though musically they didn't come to much. Those were the days before anybody had thought to supply the army bands with new music, so "She's My Daisy" and "The Washington Post" made a daily appearance.

But the concerts did not want for attendance. The soldiers stood around by the hundreds, and listened and looked off over the hills to where the guns were rumbling, whenever the children were not exacting too much attention.

This child-soldier combination had just two words. The child said "Hello," which was all his English, and the party lasted till the soldier, billet-bound, said "Fee-neesh," which was all his French. But nobody could deny that both of them had a good time.

Letter-writing was another favorite sport with the First Division, to the great dole of the censors. Of course the men were homesick. That was one reason. The other was that they had left home as heroes, and they didn't intend to let the glory lapse merely because they had come across to France and been slapped into school. The censors were astounded by what they read . . . gory battles of the day before, terrific air-raids, bombardments of camp, etc. Some of the men told how they had slaughtered Germans with their bare hands. Most of the letters were adjudged harmless, and of little aid or comfort to the enemy, so they were passed through. But some of the families of the First Division must have thought that the War Department was holding out an awful lot on the American public.

Mid-July saw the camp in fair working order. The First Division had word that it was presently to be joined by the New England Division and the Rainbow Division, both National Guardsmen, and representative of every State.

American participation began to take shape as a real factor, a stern and sombre business, and all the lighter, easier sides of the expedition began to fall back, and work and grimness came on together.

The French Alpine Chasseurs – whom the Americans promptly called "chasers" – had a party with the Americans on July 14, when the whole day was given over to a picnic, with boxing, wrestling, track sports, and a lot of food. That was the last party in the training-camp till Christmas.

The work that began then had no let-up till the first three battalions went into the trenches late in October. The steadily increasing number of men widened the area of the training-camp, but they made no difference in the contents of the working-day, nor in the system by which it proceeded.

Within the three weeks after the First Division had landed, the work of army-building began.

CHAPTER VI

GETTING THEIR STRIDE

THAT part of France which became America in July, 1917, was of about the shape of a long-handled tennis-racket. The broad oval was lying just behind the fighting-lines. The handle reached back to the sea. Then, to the ruin of the simile, the artillery-schools, the aviation-fields, and the base hospitals made excrescences on the handle, so that an apter symbol would be a large and unshapely string of beads.

But France lends itself to pretty exact plotting out. There are no lakes or mountains to dodge, nor particularly big cities to edge over to. In the main, the organizing staffs of the two nations could draw lines from the coast to the battle-fields, and say: "Between these two shall America have her habitation and her name."

The infantry trained in the Vosges. The artillery-ranges were next behind, and then the aviation-grounds. The hospitals were placed everywhere along the lines, from field-bases to those far in the rear. And because neither French train service nor Franco-American motor service could bear the giant burden of man-and-supply transportation, the first job to which the engineer and labor units were assigned was laying road-beds across France for a four-track railroad within the American lines.

In those days America did not look forward to the emergency which was to brigade her troops with French or British, under Allied Generalissimo Foch. Her plans were to put in a force which should be, as the English say of their flats, "self-contained." If this arrangement had a fault, it was that it was too leisurely. It was certainly not lacking on the side of magnificence, either in concept or carrying-out.

The scheme of bringing not only army but base of supplies, both proportionate to a nation of a hundred million people, was necessarily begun from the ground up. The American Army built railroads and warehouses as a matter of course. It laid out training-camps for the various arms of the service on an unheard-of scale. As it happens, the original American plan was changed by the force of circumstances. Much of the American man-power eventually was brigaded with the British and French and went through the British and French soldier-making mills. But the territory marked America still remains America and the excellent showing made by the War Department in shipping men during the spring and early summer of 1918 furnished a supply of soldiers sufficient to make allotments to the Allies directly and at the same time preserve a considerable force as a distinctly American Army. It is possible that the fastest method of preparation possible might have been to brigade with the Allies from the beginning. But it would have been difficult to induce America to accept such a plan if it had not been for the emergency created by the great German drive of the spring of 1918.

American engineers were both building railroads and running them from July on. The hospital units were installed even earlier. The first work of an army comes behind the lines and a large proportion of the early arrivals of the A. E. F. were non-fighting units. At that there was no satisfying the early demands for labor. As late as mid-August General Pershing was still doing the military equivalent of tearing his hair for more labor units and stevedores. A small number of negroes employed as civilian stevedores came with the First Division, but they could not begin to fill the needs. Later all the stevedores sent were regularly enlisted members of the army. While the great undertaking was still on paper and the tips of tongues, the infantry was beginning its hard lessons in the Vosges. The First Division was made up of something less than 50 per cent of experienced soldiers, although it was a regular army division. The leaven of learning was too scant. The rookies were all potentiality. The training was done with French soldiers and for the first little while under French officers. A division of Chasseurs Alpines was withdrawn from the line to act as instructors for

the Americans, and for two months the armies worked side by side. "You will have the honor," so the French order read, "of spending your permission in training the American troops." This might not seem like the pleasantest of all possible vacations for men from the line, but the chasseurs seemed to take to it readily enough. These Chasseurs Alpines – the Blue Devils – were the finest troops the French had. And if they were to give their American guests some sound instruction later on, they were to give them the surprise of their lives first.

The French officer is the most dazzling sight alive, but the French soldier is not. Five feet of height is regarded as an abundance. He got his name of "poilu" not so much from his beard as from his perpetual little black mustache.

The doughboys called him "Froggy" with ever so definite a sense of condescension.

"Yes, they look like nothing – but you try following them for half a day," said an American officer of the "poilus."

They have a short, choppy stride, far different to the gangling gait of the American soldier. The observer who looks them over and decides they would be piffing on the march, forgets to see that they have the width of an opera-singer under the arms, and that they no more get winded on their terrific sprints than Caruso does on his high C's.

And after they had done some stunts with lifting guns by the bayonet tip, and had heaved bombs by the afternoon, the doughboys called in their old opinions and got some new ones.

All sorts of things were helping along the international liking and respect. The prowess of the French soldiers was one of the most important. But the soldiers' interpretation of Pershing's first general order to the troops was another. This order ran:

"For the first time in history an American Army finds itself in European territory. The good name of the United States of America and the maintenance of cordial relations require the perfect deportment of each member of this command. It is of the gravest importance that the soldiers of the American Army shall at all times treat the French people, and especially the women, with the greatest courtesy and consideration. The valiant deeds of the French Army and the Allies, by which together they have successfully maintained the common cause for three years, and the sacrifices of the civil population of France in support of their armies command our profound respect. This can best be expressed on the part of our forces by uniform courtesies to all the French people, and by the faithful observance of their laws and customs. The intense cultivation of the soil in France, under conditions caused by the war, makes it necessary that extreme care should be taken to do no damage to private property. The entire French manhood capable of bearing arms is in the field fighting the enemy, and it should, therefore, be a point of honor to each member of the American Army to avoid doing the least damage to any property in France."

Veteran soldiers take a general order as a general order, following it literally. Recruits on a mission such as the First Division's took that first general order as a sort of intimation, on which they were to build their own conceptions of gallantry and good-will. Not only did they avoid doing damage to French property, they minded the babies, drew the well-water, carried faggots, peeled potatoes – did anything and everything they found a Frenchwoman doing, if they had some off time.

They fed the children from their own mess, kept them behind the lines at grenade practice, mended their toys and made them new ones.

These things cemented the international friendliness that the statesmen of the two countries had made so much talk of. And by the time the war training was to begin, doughboys and Blue Devils tramped over the long white roads together with nothing more unfriendly left between them than rivalry.

The first thing they were set to do was trench-digging. The Vosges boast splendid meadows. The Americans were told to dig themselves in. The method of training with the French was to mark a line where the trench should be, put the French at one end and the Americans at the other. Then they were to dig toward each other as if the devil was after them, and compare progress when they met.

Trench-digging is every army's prize abomination. A good hate for the trenches was the first step of the Americans toward becoming professional. It was said of the Canadians early in the war that though they would die in the last ditch they wouldn't dig it.

No army but the German ever attempted to make its trenches neat and cosy homes, but even the hasty gully required by the French seemed an obnoxious burden to the doughboy. The first marines who dug a trench with the Blue Devils found that their picks struck a stone at every other blow, and that by the time they had dug deep enough to conceal their length they were almost too exhausted to climb out again.

The ten days given over to trench-digging was not so much because the technic was intricate or the method difficult to learn. They were to break the spirit of the soldiers and hammer down their conviction that they would rather be shot in the open than dig a trench to hide in. They were also to keep the aching backs and weary shoulders from getting overstiff. Toward the end of July the first batch of infantrymen were called off their trenches and were started at bomb practice. At first they used dummy bombs. The little line of Blue Devils who were to start the party picked up their bombs, swung their arms slowly overhead, held them straight from wrist to shoulder, and let their bombs sail easily up on a long, gentle arc, which presently landed them in the practice trenches.

"One-two-three-four," they counted, and away went the bombs. The doughboys laughed. It seemed to them a throw fit only for a woman or a substitute third baseman in the Texas League. When their turn came, the doughboys showed the Blue Devils the right way to throw a bomb. They lined them out with a ton of energy behind each throw, and the bombs went shooting straight through the air, level above the trench-lines, and a distance possibly twice as far as that attained by the Frenchmen. They stood back waiting for the applause that did not come.

"The objects are two in bomb-throwing, and you did not make either," said the French instructor. "You must land your bomb in the trenches – they do no more harm than wind when they fly straight – and you must save your arm so that you can throw all afternoon."

So the baseball throw was frowned out, and the half-womanish, half-cricket throw was brought in.

After the doughboys had mastered their method they were put to getting somewhere with it. They were given trenches first at ten metres' distance, and then at twenty. Then there were competitions, and war training borrowed some of the fun of a track meet. The French had odds on. No army has ever equalled them for accuracy of bomb-throwing, and the doughboys, once pried loose from their baseball advantage, were not in a position to push the French for their laurels. The American Army's respect for the French began to have growing-pains. But what with driving hard work, the doughboys learned finally to land a dummy bomb so that it didn't disgrace them.

With early August came the live grenades, and the first serious defect in the American's natural aptitude for war-making was turned up. This defect had the pleasant quality of being sentimentally correct, even if sharply reprehensible from the French point of view. It was, in brief, that the soldiers had no sense of danger, and resisted all efforts to implant one, partly from sheer lack of imagination in training, and partly from a scorn of taking to cover.

The live bombs were hurled from deep trenches, aimed not at a point, but at a distance – any distance, so it was safe. But once the bombs were thrown, every other doughboy would straighten up in his trench to see what he had hit. Faces were nipped time and again by the fragments of flying steel, and the French heaped admonitions on admonitions, but it was long before the American soldiers would take their war-game seriously.

Later, in the mass attacks on "enemy trenches," when they were ordered to duck on the grass to avoid the bullets, the doughboys ducked as they were told, then popped up at once on one elbow to see what they could see. The Blue Devils training with them lay like prone statues. The doughboys looked at them in astonishment, and said, openly and frequently: "But there ain't any bullets."

It was finally from the British, who came later as instructors, that the doughboys accepted it as gospel that they must be pragmatic about the dangers, and "act as if..." Then some of the wiseacres at the camp pronounced the conviction that the Americans thought the French were melodramatic, and by no means to be copied, until they found their British first cousins, surely above reproach for needless emotionalism, were doing the same strange things.

The state of mind into which Allied instructors sought to drive or coax the Americans was pinned into a sharp phrase by a Far Western enlisted man before he left his own country. A melancholy relative had said, as he departed: "Are you ready to give your life to your country?" To which the soldier answered: "You bet your neck I'm not – I'm going to make some German give his life for his."

This was representative enough of the sentiments of the doughboys, but the instructors ran afoul of their deepest convictions when they insisted that this was an art to be learned, not a mere preference to be favored.

After the live bombs came the first lessons in machine-gun fire, using the French machine-gun and automatic rifle. The soldiers were taught to take both weapons apart and put them together again, and then they were ordered to fire them.

The first trooper to tackle an automatic rifle aimed the little monster from the trenches, and opened fire, but he found to his discomfiture that he had sprayed the hilltops instead of the range, and one of the officers of the Blue Devils told him he would better be careful or he would be transferred to the anti-aircraft service.

The veterans of the army, however, had little trouble with the automatic rifle or the machine-guns, even at first. The target was 200 metres away, at the foot of a hill, and the first of the sergeants to tackle it made 30 hits out of a possible 34.

The average for the army fell short of this, but the men were kept at it till they were thoroughly proficient.

One characteristic of all the training of the early days at camp was that both officers and men were being prepared to train later troops in their turn, so that many lectures in war theory and science, and many demonstrations of both, were included there. This accounted for much of the additional time required to train the First Division.

But while their own training was unusually long drawn out, they were being schooled in the most intensive methods in use in either French or British Army. It was an unending matter for disgust to the doughboy that it took him so long to learn to hurry.

CHAPTER VII

SPEEDING UP

WHILE the soldiers were still, figuratively speaking, in their own trenches and learning the several arts of getting out, the officers of the infantry camp were having some special instructions in instructing.

Young captains and lieutenants were placed in command of companies of the Blue Devils, and told to put them through their paces – in French.

It was, of course, a point of honor with the officers not to fall back into English, even in an emergency. One particularly nervous young man, who had ordered his French platoon to march to a cliff some distance away, forgot the word for "Halt" or "Turn around" as the disciplined Blue Devils, eyes straight ahead, marched firmly down upon their doom. At the very edge, while the American clinched his sticky palms and wondered what miracle would save him, a helpful French officer called "Halte," and the American suddenly remembered that the word was the same in both languages – an experience revoltingly frequent with Americans in distress with their French.

But disasters such as this were not numerous. The officers worked excellently, at French as well as soldiering, and little precious time was needed for them.

Three battalions were at work at this first training – two American and one French. As these learned their lessons, they were put forward to the next ones, and new troops began at the beginning. This plan was thoroughly organized at the very beginning, so that the later enormous influx of troops did not disrupt it, and as the first Americans came nearer to the perfection they were after, they were put back to leaven the raw troops as the French Blue Devils had done for the first of them.

The plan further meant that after the first few weeks, what with beginners in the First Division and newly arriving troops, the Vosges fields offered instruction at almost anything along the programme on any given day.

Over the whole camp, the aim of the French officers was to reproduce actual battle conditions as absolutely as possible, and to eliminate, within reason, any advantage that surprise might give to the Germans.

By the end of the first week in August, the best scholars among the trench-diggers and bombers were being shown how to clean out trenches with live grenades, and the machine-gunners and marksmen were getting good enough to be willing to bet their own money on their performances.

Then came the battalion problems, the proper use of grenades by men advancing in formations against a mythical enemy in intrenched positions.

From the beginning, the American Army refused to accept the theory that the war would never again get into the open. They trained in open warfare, and with a far greater zest – partly, of course, because it was the thing they knew already, though they found they had some things to unlearn.

Then the war brought about a reorganization of American army units, and it was necessary for the officers to familiarize themselves with new conditions. The reorganization was ordered early in August, and put into effect shortly afterward. The request from General Pershing that the administrative units of the infantry be altered to conform with European systems had in its favor the fact that it economized higher officers and regimental staffs, for at the same time that divisions were made smaller, regiments were made larger.

The new arrangement of the infantry called for a company of 250 enlisted men and 6 commissioned officers, instead of 100 men and 3 officers. Each company was then divided into 4 platoons, with a lieutenant in command. Each regiment was made up of 3 battalions of 4 companies each, supplemented by regimental headquarters and the supply and machine-gun organizations.

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