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Dinsmore Ely

Dinsmore Ely / One Who Served

PUBLISHER'S FOREWORD

In the battlefields of France there are thousands of American graves; graves of our best and bravest; sacred places to which we shall make pilgrimage in the years to come and over which we shall stand with tears on our faces and with pride in our hearts. Our heads will be bared because the ground is consecrated; the last resting place of heroes who gave their young and beautiful lives for their country's cause.

Dinsmore Ely was one who gave. His was the Great, the Supreme Sacrifice. Never was Crusader of old inspired by higher and holier motives. In his letters home, which we have the privilege of giving to the public, there is revealed a knightly soul: the soul of a Bayard "without fear and without reproach."

PRELUDE

By Dr. James O. Ely

My Son

Of old Scotch-Covenanter blood he came.
Into the Presbyterian Church he was born, and at her altar dedicated to the service of his God.
Taken back, when four years of age, to the old home in the Pennsylvania hills, he was present at the Centennial Celebration of the church where his ancestors have worshiped for five generations.
Called on to say his little speech – I can see him yet – he marched bravely down the long aisle of the crowded auditorium, climbed up the pulpit steps, too high for his short legs and, facing the great audience, the childish treble rang out true and clear, as he volunteered for his first service under the banner of the Cross:

My name is Dinsmore Ely, I'm only four years old;
I want to fight for Jesus and wear a crown of gold;
I know he'll make me happy, be with me all the day;
I mean to fight for Jesus, the Bible says I may.

Twenty years passed. His country called. Among the first to answer, he volunteered in the American Ambulance Field Service that he might secure immediate passage to France and go at once into active service. Arriving there on the fourth of July, 1917, on the sixth he volunteered and was accepted the same day, in the Lafayette Flying Corps.

Taking his aviation training for a fighting pilot in the French schools and leaving the last school in January, with the reputation of wonderful skill as a flyer and aerial gunner, he volunteered at once for service with a French escadrille, serving and fighting with it from January to April in the Toul Sector near Verdun, when his escadrille was ordered to Montdidier, then the center of the great German drive.

On reaching Paris, he was notified to report at American Army headquarters to receive his commission in the United States Army. Having received it, at his own request, he was assigned as a detached volunteer American officer to go into battle at once with his old French escadrille.

On the following day, in closing his last letter to his parents, he wrote, in a single short sentence, his creed as an American Soldier, and, all unknowingly his own epitaph, now carved in stone upon his grave in the cemetery at Versailles, the heart of France:

It is an investment, not a loss,
when a man dies for his country.

Flying in his Spad to Montdidier, Death met him near Villacoublay.
In his poem, *To Whom the Wreath*, an appeal for the fatherless children of France, he wrote:

Give us to help beat back the Hun,
But give the French the honor won;
Pray God, we'll know when Death is done,
That France is safe and Children's Homes.

Death is done, my Soldier Son, and you know, aye, you know, that France is safe and children's homes.

And the little mother (ah! well we ken, Laddie, you and I, how much she gave herself to you) sends you this message:

“Thank God I gave my boy to be a Soldier,”

and saying it, her face glowed with the pride of the mother whose first-born son, flying in the heavens, was transfigured before her eyes as he soared upwards into the presence of his God.

We'll nae' forget you, Laddie, and we'll be greeting you soon, but while we tarry here, sitting often alone by the fireside in the old home you loved, we won't grieve for you, Laddie, and if we are a wee bit lonely at times, we will open the treasure box of “pleasant memories” you left us and let the joy of them fill our hearts.

Your Father.

Winnetka, Ill., March 1, 1919.

Dinsmore Ely

Monday, June 25, 1917.

O great day! O wonderful world! O fortunate boy! Can it be I sail for France – France, the beautiful – the romantic – the aesthetic, and France the noble – the magnificent? Yes, it is true. It is all real. The babbling crowd and gangplank and piled trunks and excited companions – the hissing, roaring, thundering whistle, the cry of shrill voices, the moving of mass, the joyous and sad faces, waving handkerchiefs, passing boats and docks, the Battery, Liberty, the open sea – and New York fades behind with the pilot boat taking back the last letters of frantically written farewells. The noise is past now; there is a strange silence as the gentle swell of a calm ocean comes to us; we become aware of the steady throb of the engine. People wander about restlessly with hands dangling at their sides. They know the past; they try to realize the present; they are ignorant of the future. We are on the great Atlantic, we are sailing to France!

Tuesday.

Five-thirty found me wide awake, so I got up, and with great difficulty succeeded in making the *steward de bains* understand that I wanted a bath. They all speak French very fluently – just as fluently as I speak English. Well, I shall know how to take a French bath by tomorrow, or know the reason why. There were only a few on deck, so I had a good walk. Breakfast (*petit déjeuner*) was at six-thirty. Real breakfast comes at ten-thirty, but one eats so often that it is too tiresome talking about meals. The real topic of conversation is seasickness. It is enough to make anybody sick. Everyone looks at everyone else and at themselves in the mirror to see if they can find or create symptoms. The ocean is as smooth as glass, and still they talk. If I am to be seasick, it must come naturally. Darn if I'll create my own atmosphere. The boundless blue is the most beautiful and serene outlook imaginable. It is great. Already I am at perfect rest. After breakfast I went right to sleep on the deck. At nine there was a Y. M. C. A. French class on the hatch cover, and we joined them. It is a “blab” school in which everybody yells in unison with the leader. It is very funny while your voice lasts, and remarkably instructive. It gives confidence in pronunciation. There are a lot of people outside of our party whom I know. Probably more will turn up. I have not met all our own men yet... Well, there is time to burn. The day was mostly spent in lounging about. I did not try to make any acquaintances. Dave Reed and I were lucky enough to get chairs. He is the “salt of the earth.”

Thursday, June 28.

We had a preliminary life-insurance drill today, which consisted in our assembling in our proper positions on the deck, and then going to dinner. Rumor has it that on the last trip this boat had its rudder shot off and that our captain sank a submarine. Yesterday a freighter passed and they kept our guns trained on it from the time it came in sight till it sank away to the rear. The Germans are using such boats now to sink transports. We are not allowed to open portholes, and the lighting of matches and cigarettes is forbidden on deck at night. This sounds like war. From the time when I first read *Treasure Island* and *Via Crucis* I have envied those who lived in the ages of pirates and crusaders and Indians. I felt that they faced real hardships and fought real foes – in short, lived life to its fullest – while we, raised on milk and honey, were deprived of the right to face our dragon and bear our metal. But behold! Here we are facing the greatest foe of civilization in the greatest war of Christendom – a war not merely of steel and brawn – but a war on and over and under the seas; on and around and through the earth – a war in which plants and animals and all that is animate take part – a war of physical energy, mental versatility, and worldly resource taking equal part. Here the war god is taking the world at its prime – a world thrilling with the vitality and enthusiasm of achievement. He is taking this world which for thousands of years man has labored to cultivate and promote, and is

marring and crushing it and sending it hurtling back through the ages to another hopeless, obscure beginning, and we are insects upon its surface. Each one of us gambles with Fate, putting ingenuity against the laws of chance, to see if he will be crushed as the good old world rolls down the slope of progressive civilization into the murky vale of barbarism. And we live in this age. If we die, it is for the Cause. If we live, it is to see an era of remodeling which will be unparalleled. Maps and boundaries, governments and peoples, religion and science – all will be reconstructed. Terms such as “international law,” “humane justice,” “survival of the fittest,” “militarism,” “monarchy,” “culture,” and – who knows – perhaps even “Christianity,” may be laid away on the shelf as no longer practicable.

And, oh, the outcome! Will the lucky ones be those who go or those who stay? We are told that without doubt we go into transport driving. Me for aeronautics. It’s no use, I cannot think of anything else. It’s what I am best fitted for, and it is the way I was meant to live. Stake all – spend all – lose all, or win all – and that is as it should be.

As per father’s advice, I am reading a history of France. On my own hook, I am reading a *Reserve Officers’ Handbook*.

This morning we had setting up exercises on the foredeck. This afternoon, a doctor of some kind or other gave a lengthy discourse on the elements of philosophy. It was cloudy, but warm all day, and the sunset was beautiful. We gain half an hour a day on the clock. At this rate, we will be over in nine days if the weather continues.

Good night

Friday, June 29, 1917.

This is really Sunday afternoon, but I want to keep up the bluff of seeming to write every day. As a matter of fact, I do not think that a diary should be written every day just because the person has resolved to do it. Anything so written is bound to be lifeless and uninteresting. As a catalogue of events, a diary would be monotonous reading. As an outlet to thoughts, it should be spontaneous. When events of importance take place, they will be incentive enough to write. This day has really been lacking in events – let it go at that.

Saturday, June 30.

There are some sad French birds trying to sing. It sounds like the first rehearsal of a ragtime opera, the cast being depressed by the experiences of the night before. I cannot grant them much.

Well, today we had track meet on board. Good exercise, entertainment, and time killer it was. First came the three-legged race; then the sack race; then the Japanese sword fight; then the cock fight; then the bar and jack fight; and finally the tug of war. Dave Reed and I had the three-legged race cinched when I, like a poor simp, started to go on the opposite side of a post from him and we fell in the final. I lost the sack race and won the Jap sword fight. I also won the bar and jack fight. They made me captain of the M. I. T. tug of war, and that is why we lost, because I was the hoodoo right through. The thing I did was the only one they forgot to award a box of candy for – that is my luck – but it was great exercise, and I slept better than any time yet.

A pretty fair wind is coming up. They have put two men in irons I understand; one for insulting a lady, the other for being drunk. There is far too much drinking to please me. I had my porthole open last night, and a wave slushed in and soaked my bed. This “rocked in the cradle of the deep” must stop for the present.

Sunday, July 1.

And the strange part about it is, that it seems like Sunday. The Lord made the water so rough that we almost got seasick. I do not know whether it made people more or less religious. I didn’t go in, because the fresh air seemed better for seasickness than a sermon would be. The waves were dashing

over the prow and tossing buckets of water up on the deck, so I got on my waterproof outfit. You know, there is a system to the waves. The longer one watches them, the surer one gets, but it's with the waves as with human nature. The laws governing them are so complex that one cannot discover them in a single short life. There was a good singing festival in the evening.

Good night

Monday, July 2.

We have entered the danger zone. The life boats are swung out; the guns are uncovered, and the men beside them ready. Passengers are requested to sleep on deck with their clothes on and life preservers near at hand. The day is clear and calm and excellent for submarine fishing. This evening as the sun was setting, two whales spouted on the starboard sky line – get that “starboard.” Some claimed it was a sea battle between two submarines; others mentioned water spouts. A few of the *blasés* who were nearsighted, said it was imagination. Everybody was a trifle nervous.

The people down in the steerage have great times. We sit up and watch them play buzz and elephant, and when the idea of the game is grasped we imitate them. Buzz is played by three men standing in a row. The middle man wears a hat. He puts his hands up to his mouth and buzzes like a hornets' nest and then slaps the face of one of the other men. The man who is hit tries to knock off the hat. If the buzzer ducks quickly, the hat stays on. It is hard to describe, but fun to watch. The result is a good complexion.

Today, I made a pencil sketch, assorted my letters of recommendation and catalogued them, and read fifty pages of history. Never have I been content to do so little. Each day I approach nearer to perfect idleness by doing half as much as the day before, but at that, I am getting in better condition all the time.

Last evening at ten-thirty I strolled aft and looked down on the main deck below. The moon was shining dreamily on the smooth, billowy ocean, and there was a faint trickle of water at the prow. As our ship cut its path in the gossamer, phantom couples glided about on the moonlit deck to the soft, tinkling music of the ukulélé; gentle voices and soft laughter made you know the phantoms were real, yet it was all so like dream fairies dancing to a lullaby. It was one of those scenes which you recognize on the instant as a treasure in the scrapbook of memory, and you hold your breath to drink your fill at a single draught, that the impression may be perfect... After the dance we took some exercises on the horizontal bar and then turned in on deck. Sleeping in the moonlight is great if one has the strength of intellect or fatigue of body to keep the mind off those who dwell in the moon. Each heart recalls a different name, but all sang *Annie Laurie*.

Tuesday, July 3, 1917.

Well, today was the day a submarine was sighted about a mile to port at three in the afternoon. It submerged before any shots were fired, but the passengers on deck saw it and the captain swung the boat sharply to right and left. Everybody was pretty much excited. All day the calm surface of the ocean has been bespecked with drifting boxes, kegs and spars from ships, which have been sunk in the vicinity lately. Two dead horses drifted by. We are in the Bay of Biscay, and due to arrive at land in the mouth of the Garonne River at three tomorrow morning, and at Bordeaux at six in the afternoon. Today I have written ten letters, three days' diary, have made a water-color sketch, and done twenty pages of history. To think we are to be in France tomorrow! Why, we are so close that we could row to shore now if the blooming Huns didn't shoot us in the life boats.

But I don't believe they'll get us.

Wednesday, July 4, 1917.

We slept out on deck in a fast wind. We had a fight with the steward because he wouldn't let us bring our mattresses down on deck. We slept fitfully during the night, for danger was imminent, and at three o'clock we were awakened by hushed excitement. A little sail boat pulled alongside and the pilot boarded us. We had come to the harbor mouth and lights showed the promontories which marked the mouth of the Garonne River. Slowly we wended our way through the mine fields as the dawn broke through the haze; still we were not safe until the net gates of the harbor were pulled behind us. When the day was really with us, French soil was a welcome sight on either side. France, wonderful France! I went down and bathed, dressed in khaki uniform, packed my baggage, and then came out to enjoy the sights. They more than fulfilled all my hopes. The harbor was fairly full of all manner of boats, of which many were old, four-masted, square-rigged schooners. The shores were beautiful. A little town, Royan, nestled on the shore, its stucco tile-roof buildings ranging up from the water in picturesque terraces. Spires and towers protruded above the sky line of trees. Along the beach were beautifully colored bathing canopies. The bay itself was an olive-green. We stayed arranging our baggage and then started up the river. The countryside on either bank was as picturesque as an artist's dream. It is the claret land of the château country, home of the world's finest wines. Wonderful villas nestle up on the crest of wooded hills and the long rows of vineyards sweep down the slope to the little peasants' farm houses on the river bank. These little farm houses with their small windows, low doors, and red-tile roofs are the most picturesque imaginable. The building material is a warm yellow stone or stucco, mellow with age, and the tile of the roofs is stained, weathered, and mossgrown, but most beautiful and wonderful of all is the natural environment. It seems as though nature had absorbed an education in art from the art-loving French. The trees in the manner of their growth have caught the spirit of refined cultivation, and grown in a limitless variety of oddly picturesque forms which want no training. A long line of stilted poplars with bushy heads march up the roadside over a hill. A few gnarled and hump-backed beeches squat about the little ferry wharf, and to the side are well-rounded clumps of maples and beautiful pointed boxwoods, while in the distance great bare-legged elms stand close together, their great arms waving great masses of foliage toward the sky. But it is all beyond description. It looks as if it had been laid out to the master-plan of a great landscape gardener. As we go up the river people run to the bank and wave and cheer from under the trees. We pass neat, newly built factory towns which house German prisoners in long barracks. Farther along, yellow chalk cliffs loom up on the left. Along the ridge are wonderful châteaux – not an extravagant show of wealth as in America, but substantial old country seats. At the base of the cliffs are little villages and the cliffs themselves are dotted with doors and windows where the peasants have cut cave dwellings.

But here we approach Bordeaux. Considerable manufacturing is done in the suburbs, but there seems to be little smoke. Every factory has an orchard and garden in its back yard, and rows of poplars hide its dump heaps. The river is lined with docks and as we come to where the large boats are anchored a burst of color in the form of flags of all nations greets us, and what a pleasant surprise – the Stars and Stripes float on the top of every mast. France celebrates the Fourth of July, and from the ferries that hurry about us cheer after cheer came up, “*Vive l'Amérique.*” The sailors of our ship formed a snake dance and went all over the decks behind a silk flag singing *The Star-Spangled Banner* and then the passengers joined in answer with the *Marseillaise*, whistles shriek and fog horns bellow as the gangplank shoots out. Then down the gangplank, behind the gorgeous silk banner, march two hundred and fifty khaki-clad Americans and draw up four abreast on the platform.

Crowds lined the streets that lead to the railroad station. American flags waved from windows and people cheered and clapped as we sang our marching song, *Smile, Smile, Smile*. In the hour before train time we raided the eating houses in a riot, as sailors are supposed to do when they first reach land. Then we piled into our special train and with little delay were off in a cloud of conversation. First attempts at sleep were not very successful, though we were not crowded on the train, and everything was very comfortable. At twelve we opened our prize package luncheons, and each contained a can of sardines, a can of horse meat, a roll, a package of raisins, nuts, prunes and figs, mixed, and a bottle

of lemon pop. After lunch I stood for two hours looking at the landscape. The moon was shining, and it was almost as bright as day. Everything looked so clean and orderly. Neat little villages, all white and mystic in the moonlight whizzed by. Then I went to sleep on the coat rack, and woke up in Paris.

Thursday, July 5, 1917.

“So this is Paris!” It was the general exclamation as we stepped off the train. In a few moments the crowd had dispersed, and Reed and I found ourselves lost. By patient endeavor, however, we succeeded in reaching 21 Rue Raynouard. It is a fine old residence, its grounds covering several blocks, situated in the very heart of Paris. It is older than the United States, and its artificial terraces are covered with aged trees. The lawn is now covered with tents and barracks, and it is a delightful home for the ambulance men. There they come to spend their leave and to rest. We spent the day in arranging and adjusting ourselves, and lack of sleep for the last few nights sent most of us early to bed.

Friday, July 6, 1917.

And now things begin to move. At seven this morning we were told that we leave in the transport division for the training camp at seven tomorrow. We must pack, buy the necessary incidentals, and see Paris in twenty-four hours. Well, I did all my packing in two hours and had the rest of the day to carry out my other plans.

Yesterday I was talking to another fellow interested in aviation. He has been here some time. He said Dr. Gros, who is head of the Ambulance Medical Advisory, is vice-president of the LaFayette Flying Corps, and is the man to see. He gave us our physical examination this morning, and I made a date to see him at one-thirty this afternoon. He gave me an examination for the aero corps at two, and I passed it with ease. At three I was released from the service of the American Ambulance Corps by the help of a letter from Dr. Gros. At four I made out my application for the LaFayette corps, and so in a day was accomplished what I had allowed six months for. My plans go like clockwork. Fortune runs ahead of me, and everything turns out better and quicker, but just as I surmised it would. Dr. Gros is a personal adviser to the flying corps, and he is a wonderful man. He talks to you with the interest of a father and the intimacy of a friend. In asking his advice as to the advisability of my making the immediate change, he, a member of both organizations, said that every American's duty was the place of highest efficiency, and that if I were fitted for aviation it would be wrong to waste my time in the field service, and he also said it was for me to know if I were fitted for the higher service. Well, I have known that for some time, and the American ambulance officials were very cordial in their releasing me. They said that aviation was undoubtedly a higher service, and that they would be glad to take back into their service anybody with my spirit. (This was not a compliment.) It is what I have wanted to do, but it keeps me from being stranded in case of some unforeseen failure in aviation.

I still cannot believe the extent of my good fortune. While in Dr. Gros's office I talked with a man who came over on the *Chicago* which arrived four days before the *Rochambeau*. He said Al Winslow and his friend had come over on that boat, and that they were staying at the Hôtel Cécilia. As I could not stay at 21 Rue Raynouard, I immediately went over and signed up for a room at fourteen francs a day – a room and meals, for two dollars and eighty cents. I did not see Al, but I found he was there. That evening the “Tech” Unit took dinner with Mr. Lansingh, who came over to establish Technology Headquarters in France. After dinner we went down to some *Folies*, and took in some speedy Paris life.

Saturday, July 7, 1917.

I stayed last night with the bunch and saw them off this morning. They congratulated me on my nerve, and said they wished they could do the same. There was much picture taking, and good-byes. I hated to part from the bunch, for they were a fine set of fellows, but there are good friends everywhere. After attending to several things, which they were forced to leave undone, I took my things to the hotel. The Cécilia is a clean little family hotel occupied by Americans. It is in a nice

neighborhood, within half a block of the Etoile. The Arc de Triomphe of Napoleon is in the Etoile and forms the hub of a wheel from which radiate many beautiful boulevards and avenues. I will send a circular of the hotel. It seems that it will take a week or ten days to hear from my application. What could be better? Had I remained in the A. A. C. I should have left the city immediately. As it is, I am forced to remain ten days and get an introductory insight into the wonders of Paris – and it has its wonders. To further my luck, I find that the LaFayette Fund pays twelve francs (two dollars and forty cents) on our keep while we are waiting acceptance. That makes food and lodging cost me forty cents a day. As soon as we are accepted, we receive a commission of two hundred francs a month (forty dollars) and all expenses.

Maybe all things come around to those who wait, but that does not prove that those who seek shall not find.

Sunday.

I slept late and then took a walk in the Bois de Boulogne. It is beautiful – a park which resembles a forest in the density of its foliage – a wondrous, natural feeling retained in spite of the finish of it all. I made a sketch of the Arc de Triomphe, and a woman came along and charged me two cents to use a park bench.

In the evening I met a French gentleman who walked about six blocks helping me look for a store to buy a map of the city. Most obliging! His name was Crothers. He told me of an English club that I would probably enjoy, and said if I needed help to call on him at his office. I invited him around to my hotel without smiling. The movies were all right. *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* was playing.

Monday.

This morning I did some shopping. A shirt, a pair of garters and another sketchbook. Then I walked all over town... I walked some twenty miles or more in a vain endeavor to understand the plan of Paris and to see Notre Dame. I found the cathedral about four-thirty, and went in. I cannot describe it, but it was surely wonderful. The exterior was a trifle disappointing, but the interior – mammoth piers, soaring arches, gorgeous stained-glass windows – all gloomy and magnificent – all solemn and religious. The hollow echo of footsteps, the distant passing of flickering candles and the low chant of monks – no wonder the Catholic faith is with us yet. With such monuments and such mystery, there will always be those to sign the cross and bend the knee in reverence.

Tuesday, July 10.

It was my plan, to go to Versailles today, but Mr. Lansingh called up and asked me to send a package to one of the boys. By the time I had attended to that the morning was half gone, so I returned to the hotel for lunch. In the afternoon exercise was wanted, so I went out to the Bois de Boulogne and after walking round the pond, hired a boat. In coming up to the dock, I had noticed a young lady, very American looking, gazing at me with a twinkle in her eye. When I looked again she smiled, as one glad to see a friend. I said, “What’s the matter? Do you speak English? Come on for a ride.” She said, “Oh, the children will talk about it.” She was very refined and pretty and very English, and it seems she was a governess for these French children. She would not come until I had taken a turn around the pond. Then she did come and was very entertaining. She told me what she thought of French, English, and American men and women; how the different societies seemed to differ. It is the most sensible bit of conversation I have had since the voyage. I am going to take advantage of being away from home to meet all the various kinds of people. Such incidents are the punctuation marks of travel.

Wednesday, July 11.

The morning was spent in writing my diary. At lunch a couple of the men asked if I were going to Versailles, so I joined them. We went direct to the Tower, where a guide was waiting, who had

made arrangements to visit an aeroplane depot. We took a hurried view of the grounds, and then by taxi went to the Buc Farman Depot, where aeroplanes are made and turned over to the government. The guide introduced us to three aeronauts, who showed us about and ended up by asking if we wouldn't fly across to another depot in some new machines. Did we refuse? Well, it was wonderful. Sitting in the long, dragon-fly body, there was a moment to think. Then the pilot gave the signal for the blocks to be taken away, and like some animal the machine snorted and quivered as if unable to realize it was released. Then there was a bound; a crashing roar of wind passed my helmet; a blur of ground as we sped along the turf; and then suddenly all vibration stopped. The ground flew away beneath, and we mounted. I had thought to see things diminish gradually, but the earth *fell* away. We skimmed a grove of trees. I glanced up at the pilot to see how he controlled, and when I looked down again I noticed a team of white flies drawing a match head along a crayon mark. It was a team of horses on a country road. Then the sense of speed was lost and we seemed to be drifting along like a cloud. That rush of air had been caused only by the motor. Then I saw our shadow cross a large field in three seconds, and I decided we were still moving. A design in the map below proved to be the gardens of the palace.

The great lagoon looked like a veined setting of lapis lazuli. Still we were going up, but there was no fear, no doubt, nor distrust. It was all wonderful sport. How could anyone think of it but as a sport? I was so elated that I almost missed the city of Paris as it passed beneath.

Then we came into some light clouds. Up there the sky line, the horizon, was made of clouds that seemed to encircle us at the edge of a crater, with the multicolored molten lava beneath. Then the plane began to rock, as on a choppy sea, and we encountered what they call "bumps." All of a sudden the engine seemed to stop. There was a queer sensation of having left something behind, and before I realized it, we were almost on the ground, having dropped two thousand feet in less than a minute. The landing was like passing from asphalt to cobblestone pavement in an automobile. We had been in the air twenty minutes, and had gone thirty-two miles. When I found that out, I felt like a wireless telegram. And then what did those cordial French aeronauts do but take us home in a taxicab and invite us to lunch with them at their homes next day. At supper we were the heroes, the envy of the table, and it was just luck that I was included in the party.

Thursday.

We landed at Versailles at 11 A.M. and were met by the aviators. My host's name is Louis Gaubert. He is a splendid, unassuming man. He took me out to a little country home, a few miles from Buc, where his wife and little three year old girl met us a hundred yards from the gate. Both were pretty and affectionate and thoroughly French. Gaubert himself speaks poor, broken English, which he learned in the States some years ago. He is the oldest living French aviator, and his wife was probably the first French woman in an aeroplane. They had a garden and arbors and chickens and dogs and rabbits and birds and a player piano and a Ford and trellis roses – in fact, everything that a man could desire. To be taken into such a home is to me the greatest favor. They were so free and hospitable and so entertaining. On our way to the aviation field Gaubert took his wife and mother-in-law and baby to the station to go to Paris. They let me hold the little girl going into the station, and twice she reached up and kissed me on the cheek. It was surely a happy day. Again we went high over Paris on the cloud path, and again rode home in a taxi.

Saturday, July 14.

Up at six to get down to see the great parade. A boy by the name of Bosworth went down with me. The crowds were twenty deep about the streets, so we went up to the sixth story of a flat and asked if they had room. They said their windows were full, but the man below had a large balcony. He took us in on hearing the words "American aviator" and treated us with the utmost cordiality. The parade was good, and enthusiasm ran high. As the soldiers passed along, the crowds threw them trinkets, fruit, and money. When it was over, we were unable to find a means of conveyance, and as it was too

far to walk, we asked the man who was just getting into a Red Cross automobile with his wife, and an American flag, if he would take us up to the Etoile. He said “Yes” and again “American aviator” was the key. By the time we had reached our destination we had offered the lady flowers to pay for the ride. He had offered to take us out to Versailles as an afternoon ride. We had accepted on condition that he take dinner with us. We had dinner at a regular Parisian restaurant. As he talked fluently with his hands, I could follow his French, and then a strange thing occurred. A young lieutenant in French uniform with a more distinguished than strong face, came in with a rather doubtful-looking girl and sat down next to me. I could see the man’s face. He seemed of good blood. He watched our new friend closely. While we were eating dessert our new friend was talking to Bosworth, the officer winked at me a warning, and leaning over said, in poor English, “Do not go with that man, he is a bad man.” As we left the dining room I remained behind and talked with the officer. He said to come and see him, and we made a date for Monday. From then on I was on my guard. We had a very pleasant day, but our friend was so strenuously entertaining as to be tiresome, so I declined further engagements with him.

The gardens and buildings are very wonderful, and I am going out there more. I took a number of pictures and developed them in the evening. Both of my cameras are giving extraordinary results, and I am delighted. I shall not try to send my pictures or films home for the present until I make sure that my letters carry safely. I shall await with interest the outcome of my interview with the French lieutenant.

Sunday.

This morning I went over and helped Mr. Lansing get settled in the new “Tech” apartment. It is a Technology Club at Paris, and a very gorgeously furnished apartment it is.

This afternoon I walked ten miles around that wonderful park.¹ They have great groves of Norway pine as large and straight and thickly distributed as the grove from which our cabin logs were cut, and right near by are oaks and beech and locust and bay trees, and under the pine trees is wonderful turf, natural and unspoiled by the needles.

Good night

Monday, July 16.

In the morning I did a little shopping, and then met my friend, Sergeant Escarvage. He spent two hours and a half showing me through the National Museum of Arts and Sciences. There were experimenting offices and laboratories for testing material. He showed me the gas-mask construction. He speaks a trifle more English than I do French, so it is very interesting each trying to make the other understand. I asked him up to the hotel for Wednesday supper. He accepted.

I like him very much. His superpolish seems natural. His friendship is sincere; his sympathy unusual.

Tuesday, July 17.

It rained, and I read *The Dark Flower* by Galsworthy. His style is clean-cut and masterful. The story weighed on me. I walked ten miles and could not sleep. What this war does to people’s lives!

My papers came today.

Wednesday, July 18.

I spent the morning in getting some more papers signed in final preparation for going to Avord. We are to leave Saturday. In the afternoon I went down and saw the buildings about Napoleon’s tomb.

¹ Bois de Boulogne.

The tomb itself was not open. There were several Boche planes down there. They do not look any better to me in point of construction and workmanship than do those of the Allies. I think that rumor was bull.

Escarvage and I went for a walk and ended at the hotel. After supper he took me to the *Femina Revue*. He is interested in music and photography. He wants to help teach me French and insisted that I write to him in French and he would correct my letters and return them. He also said that when I come to Paris on my first leave I should stay with him at his apartment and we would go to the theater and to visit some places of historical interest.

Thursday.

Again the morning was spent in getting clearance papers, the afternoon, in packing, and the evening in a good walk. The pictures I developed make the results of both my cameras very good and satisfying.

Friday.

The day went slowly. I just waited around, read a little, wrote a little, sent a box of candy to the aviator Gaubert and his family, and slept.

Saturday.

And we are off to the Front. We took off on the 8.12 from the Gare de Lyon. The trip was good and the country beautiful as ever. We stopped at a garage hotel at Bourges and then proceeded to Avord where a truck met us and took us to the camp – and it is a wonderful camp. After registration we had a few hours before dinner to look around. The buildings are well built, the grounds are clean, and, outside of a few insignificant lice, the barracks are very comfortable and the grounds so extensive that it would take a week to explore them. They stretch away for miles on every side. Well-made roads lead to the various camps and here and there hangars form small towns. Motor cars and trucks carry the officers about and the troops of aviators are marching on and off duty – but most wonderful are the machines themselves. Imagine a machine leaving the ground every fifteen seconds! Do you get that? Four a minute! The air is so full of machines that it seems unsafe to be on the ground. The environment is lovely; the weather pleasant; the fields are covered with clover, buttercups, and red poppies. To those who can find pleasure in nature this cannot become monotonous, but all bids fair to be very pleasant. The first meal was very good, thanks to the numerous pessimists who had prepared me for indigestible food. From the first night I had been assigned to a barracks with a delightful bunch of men. The prospects are of nothing but the brightest.

Sunday, July 22, 1917.

The day was spent in resting and becoming settled. I went to the station at Avord to get my bed, only to find that it would not arrive for several days. When I got home the bunch had gone out to the Penguin field to make their first sorties. I hurried out and got there just in time to answer roll call, but we failed to get a chance, so we came back disappointed. We ate bread and soup at the *ordinaire* and turned in.

Monday.

There was a lecture this morning on various types of aeroplanes. In the afternoon we went out and I had my first sortie in the Penguin. Well, it was rare sport. A Penguin is a yearling aeroplane, with its wings clipped. It has a three-cylinder motor and a maximum speed of thirty-five miles an hour. A person gets into the darned thing and it goes bumping along the ground, swinging in circles and all kinds of curlicues. It was thrilling and fascinating, but the conclusion derived is that flying is not one of the primal heritages, but a science with a technique which demands schooling and drill. It is a thing to be learned as one learns to walk or swim. It is necessary to develop a whole new set of muscles and brain cells.

Tuesday.

I am reading a book on aeroplanes, which is of benefit in my technology training.

My second sortie today was not so good as the first, but I understand that that is usual. I saw a Nieuport fall and had all the thrills of witnessing a bad smash-up. We saw it coming for the ground at an angle of thirty degrees. It happened in just three seconds. In the first second, the machine struck the ground and sprang fifteen feet into the air; in the second it lit again and plunged its nose down; and in the third it turned a straight-forward somersault and landed on its back. It was over a block away, and as I was nearest, I reached it first. A two-inch stream of gasoline was pouring from the tank. When I was twenty-five feet from the plane the man crawled out from under it. Well, I had expected to drag out a mangled form, and it was some joyous thrill to see him alive. And he was cool – he took out a bent cigarette and lighted it and his hand did not shake a bit. The strap and his helmet had saved him. Everybody was happy just to know that he was not hurt. The machine had its tail, one wing, the propeller, and running gear all smashed.

Wednesday.

And this morning when the men came in from the morning classes they reported five Blériots and one Penguin smashed. One Blériot dove and turned turtle. Another lit in a tree. The other smashed running gears; and the Penguin ran through a hangar. Not long ago a Blériot dove through the roof of a bakery at seventy miles per hour. In all these accidents not a man was scratched – absolutely miraculous, but the conclusion is encouraging and reassuring, for it shows how much better the chances are than we figure on. I didn't get a sortie today.

Thursday.

No sortie today either. Went over to see the construction of the Lewis machine gun. Just before going to bed a machine flew over camp. A big white light and its red and green side lights – then suddenly, as we watched, a rocket shot out and downward in a graceful curve and burst three times in colored lights – truly a pretty sight, and as wonderful as the stars themselves.

Friday.

We have a regular program now. We rise at twenty-five minutes to seven and have drill for ten minutes. It is just a form to get the men out of bed. Then I come back, bathe, eat a crust of war bread and read or write until ten o'clock, when the first heavy meal is served. Another form drill, lasting fifteen minutes, comes at a quarter past eleven. There is often a lecture at twelve o'clock, and the men are supposed to sleep from one till three. At three they may have another class of instructions. At five supper is served. At five-thirty the troop leaves for the Penguin field. We are there till nine-fifteen and return for soup and bread and jam at ten o'clock.

This afternoon I had my third sortie in the Penguin and I begin to feel at home in it. We have been smashing one a day lately – running gears or something.

I received my first letter from home since leaving New York. It was from father, written on June 28 – just one month. I hope my letters home have not been so delayed.

Some of the boys answered an advertisement for *les mairaines*, girls living in France who would correspond with boys in the army, so I made application. It will be interesting to watch the outcome.

Tomorrow I shall print my pictures and send some home. I have not taken many since coming here, because I figure that there will be so many more interesting aeroplane pictures offer themselves.

The French Government pays us twenty-five cents a day and I spend that on candy. I am getting an awful appetite for candy. I can hardly wait till the meal is over to eat some, though it isn't very good candy at that. It is because there is no sugar in the food, I guess.

Ecole d'Aviation, Avord (Cher).

Dear Little Mother:

I am letting my diary slide for a few days and writing letters instead... I do not care how often you people write to me. It doesn't matter much what you say – it is just the sensation of receiving letters. I had a letter from my *marraine* (godmother) yesterday. Some of the fellows sent their names and mine to the doctor who made introductions by correspondence to some of the well-to-do Parisians, and as a result I now have as godmother a lady of about fifty who has two married daughters. She is of French family, but was born in Illinois. She married a Frenchman. Her home is in Paris, but she is now in their country villa at Croix-de-Brie.

We have had much rain in the last week, and there has not been much doing. I now have seven of the necessary sorties required in the Penguin class. The classes are large, and the machines break quite often. That is why progress is slow. I think I am doing somewhat better than the average, but it is too early to tell much about it. I am anxious to progress faster, but one must wait his turn, and they say it is better to go slow. There is no reason why I should not make a good flyer.

Your Son.

Tuesday, July 31, 1917.

Now I have forgotten the last day and page of my diary, and so I'll just write today. Well, I got kicked out of my bed because the man whose bed I was using returned, and I had to go into another room because there was no more room in that one. I now have a nice new bed. That is the second time I have had to change rooms and roommates. Oh, well.

I have made a regular discovery. One of the boys has a whole set of Balzac's works. I shall devour them. I have read a book a day for three days now; all my spare time I read. The weather is too hot to enjoy beating about; also I do not want to risk being handed a prison sentence for being out of place. They have strict rules and lax enforcement, but they get men now and then.

I had a letter today from Gaubert thanking me for the candy and asking me to come to stay at his house while in Paris.

Oh, I have meant to say that nothing was ever better named than the comfort bag. In hotel or in camp it is equally good, and nothing is lacking. Marjorie's wash rag is the best I've ever had. I didn't suppose a knitted wash rag would be any good. Another thing that fills the bill is my suitcase. It is the best looking and lightest one I've seen on the trip. Maybe more of my equipment will be of use than I had thought.

August 10, 1917.

Dear Father:

In reading *The Gallery of Antiquities* by Balzac, I came across this passage which made me think of your parting admonition:

Remember, my son, that your blood is pure from contaminating alliances. We owe to the honor of our ancestors sacredly preserved the right to look all women in the face and bow the knee to none but a woman, the king, and God. Yours is the right to hold your head on high and to aspire to queens.

I can say for the first time in my life with assurance that I know the honor of the family is safe in my sword. So much for my experiences – and I aspire to a queen.

Progression in my work is steady; the upper classes are so full as to retard our immediate advancement. Our class is an exceptionally good one. I changed from the evening to the morning class some days ago, and I find it was a good move. The morning class is better, and advances faster. I am reading all the literature on aviation that is to be had about camp. I wish you would communicate with the M. I. T. Aviation Department and get from them a list of the books that they are using there in the study of aviation. From this list strike out *The Aeroplane Speaks* by Barber, and *Military Aeroplanes* by G. C. Loening; also strike from the list all books published before 1915, and from the remainder you can judge what will be of use to me. They should not be so elementary as to be a waste of time, nor so technical from a mathematical standpoint as to be boresome. Compact, reliable, up-to-date

as possible information is what I want. If any of these seem worth sending, do them up in separate bundles and mail them at intervals of three or four days apart to prevent their all being lost. The less bulky, the more practical for my use. Mail these books to me – C/O Mr. Van Rensselaer Lansingh, Technology Club of Paris, 7 Rue Anatole de la Forge, Paris, France.

Mr. Lansingh keeps in constant touch with “Tech” students and communicates with their parents and with the Institute in case of accident. I will send my films to him and he will keep them after development. They are charged to my account and a set of prints returned to me. I will forward these prints to you. The films will be filed at the “Tech” Club of Paris. Any mail or cables sent to that address will be immediately forwarded to me, entailing about two days’ delay. I have opened a checking account, and deposited 1,000 francs with the Guaranty Trust Company of New York.

August 14, 1917.

Dear Little Mother:

Nothing much has happened lately, so I have not been moved to write. You will remember I told you about getting a *marraine*; how she was born in Illinois, has two married daughters, lives in her country home at present, but will be in Paris during the winter months. Well, in her second letter she asked me if she could send me tobacco or anything else I might need, so I told her to send me candied fruit and golf stockings. They arrived yesterday. Say, but that fruit was good, and the stockings were the best I ever have seen. Dark brown, with a fancy top – not too brightly colored, of light and dark green. They are most too good to wear around here with my old khaki suit.

Most of the men are buying uniforms and thirty-five dollar aviator boots and eight dollar belts and all that, but I think it will be better to wait. If the United States takes us over, it will mean another change of uniform. Perhaps my uniform will come in after all. At all events, I’ll have to buy a light serge uniform which will be cool enough for summer wear and dressy enough to wear when accepting invitations. They spend a good deal of money on clothes here, and dress pretty lively when they go to Paris. Around camp, though, there is no uniform or discipline. We wear black and brown leather coats; red, black, brown, yellow, and blue trousers; sweaters, flannel shirts; and green vests and hats ranging from sombreros to the Turkish fez. This is a division of the Foreign Legion, you know. All manner of strange people are to be seen here. The *refectoire*, called the *ordinaire* is the place where we feed, in the animalistic sense. A crowd gathers about the steps as meal time approaches, and clamors in a multitude of tongues. There are carefully dressed Frenchmen, with sensitive features and dainty little moustaches. There are heavy featured Frenchmen, with coarse manners and rough attire. There are sallow-skinned Portuguese in dandy dress who have an air of dissipated ennui, and yet have a solicitous cordiality which makes them strange and out of place. There are dark-brown Moroccans and Turcos with red fezzes, Assyrian beards, and brass studded belts. The Russians, with their gray-green sweat shirts belted at the waist, their bakers’ hats with highly colored diadems in front, and their loose black knee boots, stand aloof and talk little, but with vim. They somewhat resemble Irish in their features; and in the heart of the crowd, pressing close against the doors, as eager and clamorous and more rough in action than all, are the Americans, pushing, scrambling, elbowing, to be first into the *ordinaire*. Only their inexhaustible good humor prevents one from criticizing them. Once inside, there is a great scramble for the head of the table. Men jump up on the benches and step on and over the tables with their muddy hobnailed shoes in a vain endeavor to arrange themselves favorably. Then enterprising mechanics, who get one franc per person per month for their service, bring in stacked pans of food. These are large receptacles of a gallon capacity, and there is one stack to each table. In the top pan is meat – usually beef cut in chunks, sometimes tough, sometimes tender, always nourishing, never savory. In the second are boiled or baked or French fried potatoes, or beans or carrots, or *mélange*, similar to succotash. In the third and largest container is soup, which tastes better by artificial light, and is always the same. A weak solution of beans and cabbage and potatoes with scraps of war bread afloat. This is seldom tasted, and passes on from week to week until it becomes

richer from many cookings, and is finally eatable. At the end of the meal comes the dessert, and it is the redeeming feature. Each man has a good big spoonful of *confiture*— apple butter.

The men at the head of the table have heaping platefuls of food; those in the middle get theirs level full; those at the end are dependent upon the foresight and generosity of those above them. But the food is wholesome and clean, and if a man eats to live it will nourish him satisfactorily. For those who live to eat, there are high-priced restaurants just over the fence which are run with the sole idea of getting the soldiers' money.

This morning an order was issued that thirty of the men in the Penguin class who have had less than thirteen sorties are to leave for Tours at two o'clock. That is another school. My changing to the morning class enables me to get seventeen sorties, so I remain here. I am glad for that, because it means starting to learn on a new kind of aeroplane.

I could not make the facilities for printing pictures here suffice, so I have sent the films to Paris. It will be a couple of weeks before I can send them to you. I have taken very few pictures here, but intend to take some soon. The country hereabout is very beautiful and fertile; the sunsets have been simply glorious. The country is moist and rich in color. I am not much pleased with the group of men in this barracks and will change as soon as there is a vacancy in the one I like, but I sleep and read and walk. I am reading *Catherine de' Medici*, by Balzac. It is rich in the history of Paris. Tell father to write me whenever he can. I wish you and father would get a little vest-pocket camera like mine and send me pictures whenever you can. I find that I have a passion for photographs. Those that I have I look at almost every day.

It's good to hear that you are enjoying yourself at Black Oak. I hardly think you will be able to be miserable because Bob and I are not with you. Send any newspaper clippings of interest.

A man just came into the room with a rumor that sixty more men are to leave here in a couple of days, but does not say where they are going. At next writing I may be almost anywhere. Guess I'll scout around and get some pictures right away. Well, much love to you, Mother dear, and to father, and to everyone else.

*Your loving son,
Dinsmore.*

Bourges (Cher), August 19, 1917.

Dear Mother:

Day before yesterday I got permission to come down to Bourges where the great cathedral of St. Etienne is. It is the third best cathedral in France, and is simply magnificent. I stayed till yesterday afternoon, and then returned to camp. Bourges is fifteen miles from Avord. Then I found we had *repos* and did not go to class till tomorrow evening, so I came right back to Bourges on the first train. I will have been in the town two days and a half – well, nothing could be better. The town is built upon gentle slopes which fall away from the cathedral in its center. Houses are here ranging from just before the war back to 1200 A.D., perhaps further. Hundreds of architectural treasures are hidden in its narrow streets. A town of 45,000, it contains more good architectural designs than Chicago. But the cathedral – oh, how wonderful! I went straight to it, led by its towers showing above the house tops, and when it came into full view I stopped still and held my breath. Ponderous, massive, standing elegant, magnificent, mounting upward, delicate, airy in the skies. It held me and pressed so upon my feelings. What was it? The wonderful spirit of endeavor and faith and love of a hundred generations trying to please their God. The genius of seven centuries bending its power to produce a single masterpiece and then the endeavor of one small human being to grasp all this and hold it in one glance – as the sound of a hundred thousand voices cheering their parting army. It made me want to cry. I walked all around it twice. I took pictures of it from every angle in case something should happen to it or me. Then I went in. Oh, why try? It cannot be described. No wonder they kneel. My thoughts whispered to each other in awe. Faint glows in rainbow hues from the gorgeously stained

windows played in the distance among the forest of columns. Across the altar, which seemed like a dwarf shrine in a giant citadel six candles twinkled, as if to demonstrate the smallness of the life of man. There before the altar knelt a priest, small, with bowed head. Then there was a stir in the air, slight at first, but growing with rising and falling crescendo, and the monotonous drone of the chant echoed and reechoed among the columns till it filled the whole vault, and then died away into religious silence. I turned and mounted the winding stair into the bell tower, counting the steps – four hundred and six – four hundred and seven – oh, here was something that I could grasp and describe. There were four hundred and seven six-inch steps. The tower was two hundred and four feet high.

The fine old warden of the keys told me he couldn't take me over the place without a permit from the architect of the city, so I went to the architect's home, only to find him out. When I returned to the cathedral, disappointed, the old man said that if I would return at nine in the morning he would take me through. At nine in the morning we started. We started up the tower and branched off at one of the little doors into the clerestory that led all around the inside of the church nave. Here we saw the organ. From here we mounted a dark, uneven passage within the walls which brought us out to the lowest stage of the roof, where the bases of the flying buttresses rest. We traversed the gutter, which was really a promenade, to the choir end of the cathedral. Here again we wound up a circular stairs within a great buttress pier and came out on the little narrow stair cut right up the flying buttress span to the main roof. Here we entered another little door, and found ourselves right in the garret over the altar. Under my feet was the great span of the main vault, and over my head the original joinery of the great peaked roof. In the darkness of the garret we passed great old windlasses for lowering the huge candelabra which hung in the nave. We traversed the garret to where through a little door a shaky scaffolding led over a deep pit to the tower of the prison. Here, again, was a huge chamber lighted by narrow slits in twenty-foot walls. We descended again and at every landing was a narrow cell which came to a point in a small slit which admitted light and indentation in the stone on which to sit. It was uncanny. It was a relief to come again to the day, where the bright sunlight played upon gargoyles and grotesques hiding in the carved stone.

Such a feast of the imagination! I could sit down now and write a novel laid in the confines of that pile. Then a fellow whom I met and I went down and explored the crypt. There were unlit shrines and unaired vaults which ended by a wall one could not see over, and the air was cool and damp and so bad a match would not burn. We went out to breathe fresh air, and dream in the sun.

Your Son.

Ecole d'Aviation, Tours, August 28, 1917.

Dear Mother:

I am so sore I've got to give expression to my feelings. You see, the truth of the matter is that I've been in the hospital five days with bronchitis, and though I am practically better now I have just heard that the doctor said I must stay eight more days. It will put me so much behind my class that I am furious. It all started with a stomach ache and high fever the day I arrived in Tours. They put me in the infirmary two days and then sent me to the hospital. I was pretty sick the first two days, but it's all gone practically. My temperature is thirty-seven degrees centigrade. But it is all bull. I shall be 2,000 meters in the air when you receive this. So it will be the height of folly to think of worrying.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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