

**THE DIARY-LETTERS OF
SERGT. PEYTON
RANDOLPH CAMPBELL**

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The Diary-Letters of Sergt. Peyton Randolph Campbell by Peyton Randolph Campbell

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Sergt. Peyton Randolph Campbell

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SERG. PEYTON RANDOLPH CAMPBELL

Sergt. Peyton Randolph Campbell

ON Wednesday, September 4, 1918, near Fismes, on the Vesle River, in France, a Hun shell landed in the midst of the machine gun unit of which Sergt. Peyton Randolph Campbell was a part, taking seventeen men, including "Randy" or "Pete" as he was affectionately called. Entering Company D, 306th Machine Gun Battalion, as a private in the spring of 1918, "Randy" was soon promoted to Corporal, and a few days prior to his untimely death was made a Sergeant.

Although only twenty-four years of age, he was old in the experience of his craft and was known as a master advertising man, having held the position of Assistant Advertising Manager of Pratt & Lambert-Inc. He will long be remembered in Buffalo as the writer of many of the most effective Second Liberty Loan newspaper advertisements, particularly the facsimile newspaper front page, announcing the supposed invasion of this Country by the Germans. Subsequently, in a letter describing his experiences, he feelingly wrote: "What Fourth Liberty Loan copy I could write now!"

Despite his youth, Sergeant Campbell had also attained no small success as a short-story and song writer. His talents were varied and manifold, which makes his loss the more keenly felt by the many who knew him. "Randy's" sunny disposition and friendship, with which he was so generous, won him many friends who will find in these pages characteristic touches of humor and philosophy.

Aboard the troopship, on the way overseas, he started a diary-letter which he faithfully kept up daily and sent

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to his mother. In these diary-letters—the whole of which are reproduced in this book—"Randy" displays his descriptive powers to their best advantage. He saw not only the big things of life—and the War, particularly—but also the lesser details, and these, with the true writer's skill, he has chronicled most interestingly.

"Randy" did his duty as he saw it. When the call came he went gladly, and when his time came he undoubtedly laid down his life for his Country as freely and willingly as he had performed his daily tasks.

NOTE—The long dashes in the text of these diary-letters indicate portions deleted by censors.

The Diary-Letters of Sergt. Peyton Randolph Campbell

Monday, April 15th

At last, and for the first time since I hopped the train for camp, I've begun to "realize the war." I've gone through the fullest and most fascinating three days of my life. I'm in my seat at mess-table, in the room on the ship that has been assigned to our company. Quarters have been fixed up in what was once the hold, two decks below the main deck. When our room was shown to us, the main question immediately was "But where do we sleep?"—because there was nothing in the room but mess-tables and seats. Eventually, however, the problem was solved, and when evening came there blossomed forth from the ceiling one solid forest of hammocks, the most inextricable miz-maze you could imagine; hammocks, interlocking, hung over and under each other, criss-cross; and straight ropes and cords making a regular cobweb through which the electric lights peeked spookily. The quarters are close, as is usual on shipboard, but the ventilation is good, and the place is spotless and kept so. Incidentally, I've fallen in love with hammock slumber.

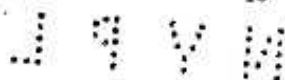
I really should go back to the beginning—to the time when we left camp. We swept the barracks clean, packed our barrack bags and ran them off in the wagons to the station. Then we made up our packs, shouldered them, and made our way outside, in slush and rain, said goodbye to our old home, and were cheered by the rookies who now inhabit it, and by the few "old fellows" like ourselves who were still left in the one end of camp. Then and there I experienced the first real, honest-to-goodness, double-dyed thrill that I've had since I first saw the endless stretches of our camp. I felt, for once, like a real crusader. Then followed—I'm old enough now to be used to anti-climaxes—one of those mysterious army orders,

brought up by the headquarters orderly. "Column right—column right!" and we were on our way back to the barracks, meeting the good-humored jeers of the on-lookers. "What's the matter—is the war over?" and "Trust those machine gunners to make a quick job of it," and the like. Then back into that bare, cold barracks we went and sat, with packs on our backs, waiting. Finally the order to proceed arrived, and off we went again to the station to entrain for—where? The name on the railway coaches told us a little, but not much. I was lucky in being one of ten fellows who "overflowed" into a car that was by no means crowded. We were all good pals and were quite comfortable. Some of the joy was taken out of life when we found that we had to guard both ends of the car, because all the other men in the car were in branches of the service that don't or can't stand guard—"medics" and the like. So "Randy" didn't get much sleep that night.

Next morning we quietly rolled out onto a pier in (gee, I wish I could tell you where) and entered a big waiting room, from the windows of which we could see our ship. We were served breakfast on the pier, and shortly after noon were admitted, one by one, to the ship and our quarters. Well, that night we pulled out—and landed plunk into the tail end of a nor'easter that had been blowing for three days! Everybody—except an occasional hardy one—among whom I was *not*—was sick. I was very sick—didn't care much what happened to me. During the night, however, the storm abated, and by the next morning, things were not so bad. All day we plowed through the ocean, out of sight of land. You may imagine our surprise, then, when the news came that instead of being in the middle of the ocean, we were off a well-known American port! A long train ride—a day and a night out of sight of land, and a lovely storm, with wave-washed decks and all that, and then back in America again.

Tuesday, April 16th

There was an interesting break in the pleasant monotony of the late afternoon. Someone spied a dark spot in the water. Almost immediately a red rocket went up



from it—then another—and as we neared it, we discovered that we had run across a broken-down hydroplane. We hove to and turned about, and as we drew near it, exchanged signals with the two aviators who were clinging to it. They had been adrift for three hours, with night almost upon them, and believe me, they were mighty lucky to be picked up. We landed the men, and towed the machine to the vicinity of ——. And there we lay at anchor for two full days! Finally we moved—with other ships. (I can't say how many.) If these first four pages seem queer or inconsistent, it's because I've had to copy them with a censor's eye, and leave out (of course) most of the interesting parts. Good-night. I'm going to bed and see if I can't fool Old Man Neptune.

Wednesday, April 17th

Well, my little trick was a success and I cheated Old Man Ocean out of one victim for eight straight hours of slumber. When I awoke, it was only through the gentle ministrations of an iron-shod heel, the same belonging to a buck private in a neighboring hammock. He was trying to disembark from his hammock, and was evidently using me as a means to an end. Oh, well! Say, this is a circus—trying to write at a mess-table down in our hold, with sock-clad feet dangling almost on your very writing-table, while their owners are busily engaged in unslinging their hammocks from the ceiling. The persiflage that is flying about, even if it could be expurgated for civilian ears (especially feminine ones!) would still create a sensation if it could ever be caught and put down on paper. There's no question about it, the germ of real humor grows to fullest glory when you're up against it, and things aren't all they might be.

Today has been more or less uneventful. I've been on "table duty" today, which means that I scrubbed the table and the floor under it, stood in line for hours, it seemed, getting hot water that was cold by the time we were ready to use it, scrubbed the pails and pans, and all those nice little things. However, I'm glad I got it on a muggy, foggy day instead of a nice one.