

**AT THE FRONT
IN A FLIVVER**

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At the Front in a Flivver by William Yorke Stevenson

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WILLIAM YORKE STEVENSON

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IN A FLIVVER**



LIEUT. MARQUIS ROBELT DE KERSAUSON DE PENNENDREFF
Commanding Section Sanitaire Américaine N^o. 1

AT THE FRONT IN A FLIVVER

BY

WILLIAM YORKE STEVENSON

Section No. 1, American Ambulance

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS



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PREFACE

IN presenting the following diary to the public, a few words of introduction may not seem superfluous. The writer is a young American who usually is not given to self-expression, although a number of articles from his pen have been published in various magazines, and a book of early sporting experiences was published by Altemus, some years ago, under the title *Joys of Sports*. On March 1, 1916, he left his family and his position as financial editor on a Philadelphia newspaper, because he felt strongly this country's attitude with regard to the war, and wished to join the few volunteers who then sought, as far as in their power lay, to pay the debt of service which this nation owed to France. He kept a rough diary which, as the occasion offered, he forwarded to his people. It was written offhand, without the remotest idea of its publication. It is this that constitutes its value at this time.

Any one who has made it his business to read every book hitherto published by correspondents and others will realize how few there are in which can be found so many practical details of the things one wants to know, or which give so realistic a view of the war at close range, with its strange mixture of horrors, pleasures, and realities, divested of all literary effort or desire to impress.

These notes are here published almost as jotted down at odd times, here and there, where the man happened to be. Only a few entries felt to be unprintable have been omitted, and a few expletives which slipped in when under a fever of excitement in action.

Taken as a whole, the diary offers a glimpse of real life at the Front — quite different from the view obtained by the personally conducted visitor — as lived by the men who are doing duty. As such, it may be of use to our young men about to enter upon the great adventure. The reader will find in it no heroics, no attempt at a pose, no desire to magnify the work

or its dangers. It is but fair, therefore, to supplement the young man's simple statement of facts, by publishing, along with the diary, a letter written to a member of his family by Mr. John H. McFadden, Jr., who, in charge of the Department of Equipment of the American Ambulance Field Service, visited his Section in September last, at a time when the strain of work was probably not at its worst, and yet was described by him as follows: —

September 9, 1916.

My dear Mrs. S.: —

I have just returned from a visit to Section No. 1, where Yorke is, and although he probably has written to you describing his work, he also probably has omitted a good deal, owing to the fact of his being a member of the Section. After seeing the extraordinary work that those boys are doing up there, I felt that I would like to write to you and tell you all about it.

A good many of the Sections are now living under canvas and have often found difficulty in finding a suitable place to cook. So that we have had built a kitchen on two wheels which

is pulled along by a big two-ton White truck used for sitting cases, and the real reason of my visit was to leave one with Section No. 1. As it happens, they are situated at the present moment in a splendid château (the Château de Billemont) about four kilometers outside of Verdun. Up to a few weeks ago it was the headquarters of some French officers, but the Germans, having got hold of the fact, shelled them out, so that it has made an ideal place for our men.

The "poste de secours" to which they are attached is six kilometers the other side of Verdun; and since ten days before my arrival, and during my stay, the French have been doing incessant attacking and counter-attacking, and the work of carrying the wounded has been practically continuous night and day.

On going to the "poste de secours" from the château, you pass through Verdun and continue on a wide, level road for about one kilometer, and then you start up a very steep hill, which continues right to the "poste de secours," for five kilometers. This road is very narrow and sufficiently dangerous from a driving point of view apart from the fact that it is shelled continuously day and night. In fact, the duty of Townsend, Section Director, is to go out every morning at daybreak with a couple of men and fill up the holes which have