

**FROM "POILU"
TO "YANK"**

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From "Poilu" to "Yank" by William Yorke Stevenson

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WILLIAM YORKE STEVENSON

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JEANNE D'ARC AND THE CATHEDRAL AT RHEIMS
The author and Paul Kurtz standing at the foot of the statue

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WILLIAM YORKE STEVENSON

Section No. 1, American Ambulance, 1917

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS



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INTRODUCTION

WHEN we parted from the happy-go-lucky heir to Leslie Buswell's famous Ambulance No. 10, — now, alas, defunct and gone to its long rest on the scrap heap, — he and his somewhat wheezy "Ford" had just gone through the fiery furnace of what at that time was regarded as the greatest battle fought by the French armies since the battle of the Marne — the victorious battle for Fleury-Souville-Tavannes, near Verdun. That the young American volunteers had done their full duty on that momentous occasion appears without comment on the last page of the lively account of the fray as described by the author of *At the Front in a Flivver*, where the citation of the entire Section No. 1 in the order of the Army Corps is

reproduced. This was awarded for the brilliant and devoted work done by the Section in the months of August and September, 1916. It is a curious fact that one year later, Lieutenant Stevenson's account of the battle and of the sort of work done by himself and his companions, so highly recognized by the heads of the French Army, received further confirmation from a source which, though humbler, was even still better qualified to pass judgment upon its quality.

The incident referred to is sufficiently singular to be given here. It was sometime in early November of the following year — 1917 — that a French officer of infantry, Lieutenant Froument, arrived on leave in Philadelphia, where he had lived many years prior to the war, earning his living as instructor in languages in a well-known school. That he had distinguished himself in sundry places of danger

was attested by the array of his decorations. Not only did the much-valued Croix de Guerre appear upon his breast, but four silver stars enhanced its value, in addition to a Russian order.

To the inquisitive reporter of a Philadelphia evening paper, who interviewed him on his arrival, he obligingly told the story of each star, every one of which represented a citation for bravery. When he reached the fourth, he told the following story, which in its essential part was published in the *Evening Bulletin* in its issue of November 10, 1917, where it was read by thousands of people on that evening:—

It was a year before, at Verdun, on the 4th of September, 1916, in the fight for Souville, that, having received orders to go forth with his battalion of two hundred and fifty men to hold the fort against an expected German attack, he went over the top. Upon arrival at their objective,

the men were surprised to find it lifeless. On penetrating it they discovered that it had been occupied by the Germans the night before, but that the tremendous shelling of the French batteries had destroyed the occupants. None but dead Germans were found there.

The French battalion then passed to Bois-Chapitre, a short distance, which, the attack having come on, they held against the Germans' violent onslaught. Their numbers, however, from two hundred and fifty were reduced to forty valid, unwounded fighters. But the attack was repulsed. All officers had been either killed or wounded. No medical help was at hand. Lieutenant Froument could not stand: both legs had been damaged — three splinters having struck his right leg while seven had seriously crippled his left. This had occurred at four o'clock in the afternoon. His captain, wounded in the