

AMERICA IN FRANCE

BY

MAJOR FREDERICK PALMER

Author of "The Last Shot," "My Year of the Great War,"
"With Our Faces in the Light," etc.



NEW YORK
DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY
1918

AMERICA IN FRANCE

To

THE MEMORY OF OUR SOLDIERS WHO
HAVE FALLEN IN FRANCE IN ORDER
THAT THEIR COMRADES WHO SUR-
VIVE MAY MAKE A BETTER WORLD

TO THE READER

Upon our entry into the war, I became one of the band of reserve officers who might do special service while they envied the men of the training camps their youth. My duties allowed me a wide range of information and observation with our expeditionary force in France from its inception. Under the spell of our marvelous achievement, which is the greatest story any American has ever had to tell, I have written about it as I knew it through its phases of building, training, fighting and of unremitting effort until we had won the Saint Mihiel salient and broken the old German line in the Argonne battle. Readers of *My Year of the Great War* and *My Second Year of the War* will have between two covers, if they choose, my third and fourth years.

FREDERICK PALMER,
Major, S.C., U.S.A.

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AMERICA IN FRANCE

I

PERSHING GOES TO FRANCE

General Pershing at the War Department—Commander of the American Expeditionary Forces—Modest beginnings of our greatest national enterprise—Specialists in war take command—The American crusader—Difficult even for the French to understand our distinterestedness—General Pershing and his staff sail from New York—Beginning staff work on shipboard—An American General reviews British troops—Ovations in Paris—The real General Pershing.

IT was in the May days of our early war emotion and war effort, after public imagination had responded to Marshal Joffre's call for American troops to fight beside his veterans. Long lines of private cars waited on the sidings of the Union Station in Washington while their owners were seeking to serve the government for a dollar a year. The word coördination had not yet become the bandied symbol of the thing most needed and most desired in harnessing the Niagara of our national energy into voltage.

Anyone passing along the corridors of the War Department who looked into the small room opposite the Chief of Staff's office might have taken the Major General and other officers within as engaged in some routine departmental work unless he had

heard someone remark: "Pershing is in there, getting ready to go to France." Such was the beginning, in a quiet office, isolated from the throbbing activity of Washington, of our greatest adventure in arms and our greatest national enterprise; and the modesty of it was in keeping with the lack of any large body of troops to send to Europe or the ships for their transport.

Our public did not then conceive of a complete Russian military collapse, let alone a German offensive sweeping over the devastated areas of the Somme which the Allies had lately won. Joffre's candid message about the situation had not disturbed the serene conviction of many Americans that our weight in the balance would drop the scales of victory for the Allies. He was the commander of trained armies born of military traditions imbibed through generations in face of the enemy's frontier. We were a people who had built fortunes and vast enterprises, homes, schools and universities, conquered wildernesses, taken riches out of the earth and set deserts abloom, but with the traditions of eight years of fighting which had made us a nation and of the fratricidal conflict in which our manhood had proved its fortitude and courage as a reminder to later generations, emigrants or home born, of what should be expected of them if they were to be worthy of our inheritance in some future trial. In 1861, few men foresaw the great armies which we should have to raise before a decision was reached. In May, 1917, no one thought of an army of a million men in France except in the imaginative flights which were the privilege of all in that period.

When you are ill you turn to the doctor. When you are at war you turn to the trained soldier. It is as easy to forget the one when you are well as to forget the other in time of peace. Although we were at war uniforms were rarely seen in our streets. In the training camps chosen young men were learning the rudiments of drill in order to become officers who should train troops to go to France under Pershing.

Our regular army had hardly been a part of our national life; it was a supplementary official necessity which we accepted along with our taxes. Suddenly, the man trained in war had become the man of the hour; "he is a regular," the tribute to a type of professional specialism which made the owner of a private car envious. Upon the way that our little band of experts molded the raw material of our manhood and organized our resources in their support depended the result of our effort, a thought that will be running through all these pages, which deal with the triumph of men as men and how they were undismayed when they lacked resources and how they utilized the resources which were forthcoming.

In the Washington hotel lobbies, where the expert in railroad building and the expert in steel-making each respected specialism, it was only incidental to our traditions that they should think that an army was a force of armed men without considering how it was organized and directed. They lived in another world from that of the officers of our General Staff in the rooms along the corridors from where Pershing had begun his organization. You thought of the large, technically trained, experienced staffs

of our large corporations in comparison with the meager personnel which was to organize an infinitely larger corporation, whose ledger account is reckoned in casualties in battle. These officers had no illusions; they understood how, in cold logic, the German Staff had reasoned that ruthless submarine warfare against Britain would gain results more than offsetting any force which we might bring against Germany before she planned to win a decision at arms. For war is a soldier's business, and our soldiers realized the immensity and the complicated difficulties of Pershing's task.

Given time and they did not lack faith in the outcome. To have lacked faith would have been un-American and shown their inappreciation of the forces that built our skyscrapers, our factories, our colleges and the spirit of our democracy and our cause. It would be confessing distrust in American manhood drilling at the training camps, in themselves and their own programme; as, happily, in this war we had taken expert advice. We were to have a national draft; specialists in war were to be given the authority to form an army along sound professional lines. The architect's plans for the structure were right; the thing now was the building. If Joffre were a marshal of accomplishment, Pershing was a marshal of potentialities.

The instructions which the General received before he left the little room to sail were of an historic simplicity. He was to proceed with his staff to Europe, there "to command all the land forces of the United States operating in continental Europe

and in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland," and to "establish, after consultation with the French War Office, all necessary bases, lines of communication, etc., and make all the incidental arrangements essential to active participation at the front."

Back of this charter of authority were all the principles that the President had enunciated in his messages. These are none the less live and true for iteration. They have been the inspiration of all our effort in France. No crusader of old went forth with a cause freer from guile than the American born of European blood returning to fight in Europe a battle which cemented a kinship of right in the world, after we had kept faith with our peaceful intentions by not preparing great armaments.

Often the French villagers asked our soldiers: "Why are you here? What do you want? Is it colonies? Is it power in the affairs of Europe?" The questions were natural from races rooted in their soil, with its defense their instinctive self-interest. Through all the months of labor in France the wonder of our being in France never ceased when thoughts took a certain turn. When they took another, the answer was, "Where else should we be?" Our troops would return with no tribute from victory; with only national consciences clear.

When and on what ship was Pershing going? Curiosity pried at the curtain of military secrecy. Men occupying rooms in the War Department adjoining the General's did not know, but the hotel lobbies knew. The embarkation was matter-of-fact enough from a government tender to the *S. S. Baltic*

in a May rain off Staten Island; and the next day the staff went to work—Commander, Chief of Staff, and other staff heads, and all Colonels, Majors, Captains, Lieutenants, interpreters and field clerks, orderlies and messengers—one hundred and fifty in all. A few were reservists who had jumped into their uniforms before sailing and were uncertain whether you saluted superiors on shipboard or not. Others wore the colors of campaigns in Cuba, the Philippines and China, and a few the red ribbon that indicated an Indian campaign, which were to mingle with the colors of South Africa and India, of Madagascar and Morocco, and those of the Military Cross, the D. S. O., the *Croix de Guerre* and *Médaille Militaire*. We were proud of our one handsome gray-haired officer who had won the Medal of Honor from Congress and ready to compare him with any winner of the Victoria Cross.

Many of the officers had never been in Europe. Their knowledge of the European war was gained from the reports of our military observers and general reading. Late in the third year of the war they were going abroad as leaders who were to apply the experience of Europe's masters to their own army. Anyone who expected that their attitude, in keeping with our generally accepted characteristic of self-assertion, would be that they proposed to "show Europe how" reckoned without the consideration that their professional training warned them that they had much to learn.

Oh, those classes in French! The interpreters organized the officers into groups of different grades, from those well-grounded in West Point book

French to the ones who did not know how to ask the way or for something to eat, while arms sore from vaccination, and too much experience with Spanish on the border were offered as excuses for not immediately acquiring a Parisian accent. General Pershing was in the first grade; he had once studied French in France. Lectures on bombing and sanitation were delivered in the dining saloon to fill in any spare time when an idler might have been playing shuffleboard.

The American destroyers, which came out to escort us at the edge of the submarine zone, were a reminder that the service which is always ready for action in the ships which it has and the crews to man them was striking the only battle blows which we had yet delivered at the enemy. Without destroyer protection there would be no American army in Europe. Ever, the destroyer, weaving its watchful course of guardianship in all weathers, will remain the symbol of a devout gratitude to all men who have crossed the Atlantic in this war. Its sight is as welcome as that of a policeman if you have a burglar in the house.

When the General reviewed the Guard of Honor on the pier at Liverpool, of course someone said, "This is historic." History had been too abundantly in the making of late years for one to be certain of values; yet it was a great moment when the leader of an American army come to fight beside British soldiers stepped ashore on English soil. It was the more important as there was no ceremony in London except an audience by the King, much to the relief of our little band of pioneers, which

was off to the War Office where each one was to meet some expert in his own line, with no lessening of his conviction of what a lot he had to learn.

In France, however, there must be ceremony. Why had Joffre asked for the prompt dispatch of troops? For the immediate effect on French *morale*. Therefore, France refused to consider the modesty of a simple American soldier who wished particularly to avoid martial display when he was bringing only a staff to Europe. She needed the stimulus of the actuality of American soldiers on her soil, which was more convincing proof that we were in this war in earnest than ten thousand columns of cablegrams about our preparations at home. Ovarions were the spontaneous outcome of Parisian feeling which should communicate its reassuring thrill to every village from Brittany to the Alps. General Lafayette's fame resplendently revived. The French schoolboy was learning as much about him as about the American. He had gone to America to help us; Pershing came to France to help the French.

Not since the war had begun had the Parisian spirit, stilled to breathless silence in the days of the Marne, breathing free again in relief after the victory, and restrained ever since by the drain of life and the pressure of the grim monotonous processes of sacrifice, broken forth in a manner worthy of welcoming a marshal returning from decisive victory. Our officers had no idea of what was in store for them. They were as embarrassed as girl graduates when, on the way from the station, the crowds surrounded their cars and threw flowers at them.

“Look pleasant, please!” called an American to a colonel.

“Only then,” said the colonel, “did I realize that I was sitting as stiff as a wooden Indian and looking as serious as a Puritan at the benediction—it was so staggering to be a hero of Paris.”

Our General found himself bowing from balconies to cheering multitudes and the recipient of attentions which were once reserved for visiting monarchs. Fortunately, he had traveled much and studiously and met all manner of men. Within the army the distinction among his fellows which he had already won before he left West Point gave him the opportunities of varied service which ranged from the General Staff in Washington to building roads and schools in the jungle and ruling the Moros, who called him “Datto,” followed by eleven years of command experience. He had been of the group of attachés with Kuroki’s army in Manchuria who were the eyes of the armies of the world in observing the first great war fought with modern arms. There I first knew him and Captain Peyton C. March, who later became our Chief of Staff. Colonel Enoch H. Crowder, who was our senior attaché, was to be responsible for our National Draft, as Provost Marshal General. The others included Sir Ian Hamilton, who led the Gallipoli expedition; Captain von Etzel, who was to command a German corps at Verdun; Colonel Corvissart, who was to command a corps opposite von Etzel’s; Captain Hoffman, very guttural and very Prussian, who became the representative of the German Staff at the Brest-Litovsk Peace Con-

ference and engineered the collapse of Russia; and Captain Caviglia, who was to distinguish himself as an army commander in the battle of the Piave.

We were to have, then, as our leader in France a man thoroughly trained for his task since the day he left Missouri to go to West Point, intrinsically American, and representative of our institutions. No soldier could have criticized his speeches for length and no diplomat for lack of appreciation of his position as the ambassador of the hundred millions. France looked him over, and liked his firm jaw, his smile, his straight figure and his straight way of looking at everyone he met. He brought cheer and promise of the only aid which France could understand, that of an armed force which fights on land. For France is of the soil and vineyards and well-tilled fields and thrifty peasants, and thinks little of the sea.

Our officers remarked with dry American humor that they were receiving all the honors due immortal heroism before they had done any fighting. The realization of the long months of waiting before we should have troops ready to go into the line put the double edge to their appreciation of the welcome by thoughtful Americans in the midst of the cheers.

II

OUR GREAT PROJECT

First American uniforms in Paris—Modest headquarters on the Rue de Constantine—Where all Americans in Paris flocked—Crowded quarters—Difficulties of making a start—Laying plans for a great army—Where should our soldiers fight, train, disembark?—Our national characteristic of thinking “big.”

OTHER pioneers had been in France in behalf of the Allied cause before our staff. We had given freely of our money and effort. Our doctors and nurses manned hospitals that we had equipped. The fliers of the Lafayette Escadrille were a little legion of American chivalry fighting in the air; and hundreds of drivers of the two American ambulance associations coursed the roads back of the French front.

They wore uniforms which distinguished them as Americans and they carried our flag in spirit or by courtesy, but their uniforms did not have U. S. on the collar and the flag was not official. The uniforms now seen in the streets were official; and the authority of the nation raised the flag at the new army headquarters in Paris, which, in its magic symbolism that where formerly some Americans had been striking Germany, now all were, was the harbinger of American flags appearing in the remotest corners of France; of busy hours for needle-women who were sewing the stars of the States,