



AUTOMOBILE CHASSIS IN PARIS FRESH FROM AMERICA, READY FOR AMBULANCE BODIES FOR NEW SECTION TO BE SENT TO THE FRONT.

American Ambulance Driver, Winner of French War Medal, Tells of Service at Fighting Front

By WILLIAM T. MARTIN.
 William T. Martin writes from personal knowledge of the heroism of the Americans who are driving automobile ambulances at the front. He has himself served as an ambulance driver and so distinguished himself as to win the French war medal. A series of articles in which he has described his experiences appeared in The Sun last winter. Since then he has done another tour of duty at the front and the article printed here is based on material he collected.

THE overlong train of a score of coaches moves almost imperceptibly into the long shed of the Paris station. No noise and slow is the motion that, except for the red light on the end coach glowing nearer and the wavy shadows along the other side of the shed, the train might be standing still. It seems to be floating in.

Standing on the platform alongside is a group of officers watching the cars approach. From their white caps and leveled caps several of them are evidently doctors or surgeons. Directly in their rear, on the left of a wide gangway, half a hundred soldiers are lined up, waiting. Over their shoulders hang long strips of canvas material with loops at the end.

On the right, along the other side, in uniforms of khaki that contrast with the blue of the French soldiers, stand about forty men in rows of four. The train is filled with wounded, one of a number running down from evacuating hospitals along the front and another to come into the station day or night on short notice, and the young men in khaki are of the American Ambulance. They are volunteers for the service in Paris and have come to take the wounded from the cars.

As the coaches of the train pass by one they seem indistinct in the dim light and are defined rather by contrast of the tricolor flags and large red crosses painted on the sides. There is no sound except the measured puffing of the engine.

Finally, after several slight jerks, the train stops. For a moment all its lights come to a sudden stop. The doors of the coaches are rolled slowly open from within. An officer on the platform gives a signal and suddenly the silence is broken by the shuffle of many feet as the Americans in pairs or in groups of three branch out in the aisles along the platform and enter the cars.

The soldiers with the straps over their shoulders, brandishers, move about ready to carry away the first stretchers as the Americans within the cars carefully lift the wounded through the doors. All the wounded come back with the two Americans and only the Americans are allowed in the cars.

In the third car to the right a couple of Americans fumble about in the dinness. More by instinct than by actual sight they make out the senseless runners running two deep, lengthwise, along the side of the car with only a break for the door. Then, as their eyes become accustomed to the flicker of a murky lamp hanging from the ceiling, the soldier attendant leads them up to the far end of the coach, to a wounded man in an ambulance. While the two Americans hold a stretcher high, slowly and with many attempts the wounded man with the help of the attendant moves over on it.

"Verdun or the Somme?" asks one of the Americans in French. His accent is foreign, for he has been over here two months. For nine years he was city editor of a paper at home.

"Verdun, of course, old top," quickly but feebly comes the answer in English. It is from the man on the stretcher. He is looking up into the other's face as he is being let down to the floor. "How is everything in Paris, anyway? Don't you know me?" It is an American accent.

and the train, it's all right. I asked to come down on it."
 He is still talking as they carry him into the stations with the others. "Hain't the crown prince didn't help me after all, did it?" he says. They had nicknamed him that because of a cap he wore.

"It surely is hot up there at Verdun now, ain't it?" As it is we've had all kinds of luck. You should see how some of the cars are shot up."

While the Americans work away in Paris, the War Office asks the Ambulance for a new section of twenty ambulances at the front. Weeks ago the old sections were moved, one by one, to points where the battle rages the fiercest. They are places where before the wounded were carried back on stretchers and the request for more ambulances is a tribute to the services of the Americans.

The chassis are already in Paris. The new recruits from America have mostly been coming up from Bordeaux, where they landed from the boats from New York. A few have come over by the way of England. For some days back they have been working like supermen, making roads. By the time the last man arrives workmen in the big establishment have finished the framework of the bodies for the chassis, and the outlines of the ambulances, representing over two years' experience in construction, have taken shape.

The new men come from many parts of the United States. Practically all are young men, of good families and full of enthusiasm for the work. Each day they go over to the factory and look themselves with the workmen as fast as they can, the departure of the section.

In this section the little compact cars represent the highest point in efficiency—knowledge gained in hard work at the front since the beginning. The small, snug bodies have places for three men. In a few seconds the interiors can be converted to accommodate sitting cases, half a dozen men and their equipment, with places for several more in the front with the driver. This is over the worst sort of roads. For cold weather there is a device to heat the car by warmth from the exhaust.

The day before the morning set for departure comes and the last touches are done feverishly here and there. By now most of the men have become ardently attached to their cars, so there is much friendly competition and some joking.

Early the next morning before most of the men in the Paris service are awake down the long line the men are at their wheels. There is the throb of many motors as they await the final order to pull out.

It might be a ship departing for a foreign country. There is the giving of many good-bys as friends of the departing men flock around the cars, entreating to write the news, the asking of last favors and the wishing of good luck while cameras click. Across the sides of each of the cars in big letters are the words "American Ambulance." Once off, there will be no turning back.

Over remarkably well kept roads, through a picturesque region of stately chateaux and quaint villages, a countryside fresh and sweet from the much recent rain, the convoy goes. It travels northward bearing to the east. They are in the war zone now. All travel is done by passes. At bridges and railroad crossings they stop to show their permits while sentinels frequently bob up at unexpected places and question them.

"Things never take on a decidedly military aspect. Passes are all work in the fields as before and all the land is tilled. Here and there are rows of trenches. Sometimes the convoy passes bodies of soldiers at target or grenade practice, or maneuvering. The actual trenches are still far away. Now and then they think they hear the sound of guns."

time under shell fire has its novelty. Following days bring more such experiences. At the end of a week the men are stanch friends of the troops. They have worked hard and have made a good impression on the French authorities, for they are told they will be moved shortly to harder service. It is over in the forest of the fighting. From the present place the commanding officer heard the day and night until the ears receive the humdrum of it in subconscious fashion.

Three days later their work is turned over to a French section and they move off in the direction of the incessant firing.

Among a little group of buildings a few miles south of a gallant of the great drive the section has its new base. They are to work out from here. The various posts along the trenches, broken together by the noise of the evacuating hospitals, in a comparative sense, out of fire. Everybody sets to work with enthusiasm making things as comfortable as possible. A big shed near by has been taken over for a shop. Already the mechanic of the section has got together his material and is at work on repairs.

It is a din which never ceases, a terrific pounding of cannon and the fearsome shrieks and crashes of tearing shells seemingly on all sides without letup. The earth shakes day and night. In spite of the rains the air is thick with earth coming in jerks, while the head rings.

An overwhelming force grips mind and nerves into a perspective apart from the world without. All else seems memory. Individuality is lost in the pulse of the fighting that consumes everything. And the drive continues.

Several days later the men are established. They work day and night in the morning set him free but told him to leave town at once.

"That's the way it's been everywhere," he continued. "I've had many a job, but everywhere as soon as they found out I'd done time the cops pinched me and drove me out."

"You know New York, Pennsylvania and New Jersey exchange records and I suppose every department in the three States has my description, so I haven't a chance to elude anywhere. I've had a dozen jobs in three weeks and each time it has been 'move on.'"

"Men are scarce these days and it's a cinch to get work. I learned the textile trade in prison and textile workers are scarce every day because so many are in the munition factories."

"But to get back to it, what am I going to do? I was pinched in Newark only yesterday and driven out when they let me go this morning. I haven't had anything to eat and I haven't got a nickel. I tell you I'm getting pretty desperate. Everywhere I go it's 'tap on the shoulder, run in jail and out of town on the run in the morning.'"

Inquiry brought out the fact that the young man, fearing every minute he would be picked up in New York and ousted, had walked from the ferry to Thomas Mott Osborne's headquarters at an uptown hotel, only to find Osborne in Oswining, which was too much of a walk. Thence he had come

trading end of a wagon jammed into its radiator, in the blackness of the night shells wiped out a post in front of the passing line of vehicles as things were being adjusted. In the darkness the wounded were sorted from the dead, and the ambulance was filled.

Here everything roundabout is levelled. The only relief is found in numbers of little hills here and there, on the sheltered sides troops take refuge as they go along. Two lonely buildings had shot down stand out together and alone—also left through chance. The road has almost been shot away.

The cars toss big batteries that fire incessantly. The air is hazy and suffocating with the smoke. Along a stretch of row of German guns point their noses over the road. Some of the guns point low over the ground. When they are about to fire soldiers run out from the ambulances and the guns have ceased. As they fire it is hard to distinguish the sound from that of shells bursting at close range.

To the left, dug into the ground, is one of the posts for the wounded. The cars pass on their way up and call on the return trip for the wounded. Here the "boyau" comes and suddenly the land becomes a maze of trenches and connecting trenches leading up to where the men are fighting in holes and ditches.

Through them and on runs the road. It is a steep hill. No military vehicles are allowed to go further. The only cars now permitted to proceed are the ambulances of the Americans. They go up the hill on low gear. Their progress is slow and laborious.

As they sneak along soldiers in the trenches on both sides who wish to cross the road jump out here and there, run hurriedly across the road and hurriedly dive into the corresponding

trenches on the other side. They scamper across like rats. But the ambulances proceed up the hill exposed to the fire.

At the top a level stretch runs by some batteries that fire continually. Near by is the wood where the soldiers call "Red men's woods." The wood is represented by a vast patch of blacked trunks of trees, stumps rather, splintered off near the ground. Occasionally one sticks up among some branches from which the leaves have been shot away. Round about the earth is pounced up in countless great denials as though cut in by a mighty plough point that has jumped here and there over the ground.

Dead men and horses are scattered over the place. The firing is too heavy to take them away or bury them. Soldiers who would bury the corpses could not catch up with the work, for their numbers would be added to continually.

The road leads past the wood. At the further end is a fort. It is here that the last post is located. The mounds of the fort shelter the ambulances from the view of the Germans, for the place is within easy shot.

Surrounding the fort are the remains of a massive wall about to perish. Soldiers move about in trenches, but the ambulances proceed through the piles of stone where evidently there had been a gate. A short distance on they go through another gate where slightly more is left of an inner wall. The gate, or part of it, hangs from a hinge to a column and a lock still sticks on it.

sonry is scattered over all. It is an indescribable scene of desolation and death, and the shells fall intermittently.

The cars enter a tunnel. It is just long enough to accommodate three ambulances at a time. When the driver finally arrives here he feels he has reached safety with an overwhelming sense of relief. All the way up it has been his consuming idea to get here. He now finds himself worrying about how to get back.

The cars await their turn to be loaded. The other end of the tunnel leads to a sort of courtyard. Thirty feet across another tunnel opens up. This tunnel connects directly with the trenches.

Into it the wounded are brought. Then they are brought across the yard between shells, for this part is shelled incessantly. Sometimes while dashing across the brassardiers are caught with the wounded and other brassardiers start. The bearers just coming in to deliver their charges and some sink down. They are relieved by others who depart immediately.

The wounded men, with the fortitude of French soldiers, suppress their groans, while on their faces is the dazed look of men freshly hurt.

Meanwhile exploding shells keep up the continuous roar. In the tunnel the explosions resemble those of giant firecrackers in barrels. Shells tearing down above burst and shake the place. Some break directly without the tunnel. Already seven of the ambulances have the woodwork of their rear ends caved in by concussion, while the bodies are torn here and there by shell fragments.

Where the wounded are the only light is from gasoline torches. The close, smoky air permeated with the heavy odor of anesthetics and the smell of unwashed, perspiring bodies stifles. Blood is everywhere and the faces seem spectrally through the haze, cannot be forgotten.

"See," a surgeon remarks to one of the Americans in a listless tone without stopping in his work, "Dante falls in his conception of hell."

Water is very scarce. It is greedily taken for medical purposes. As new cars come up soldiers enter at the drivers to let them draw from the reserve cans. If they can get enough to moisten rags to wipe their faces it is a great luxury.

On the return an ambulance darts along through the dusk. By the time it reaches the place back on the road where the soldiers stand at the front of the ambulances from the rear turn off and dismount. It is dark. The night being cloudy, blackness covers everything. Driving becomes extremely difficult. When it becomes so that the driver can barely see his hands on the steering wheel driving is done partly by instinct, partly by guess, and the frequent ghastly glare from the rockets along the line of the fighting.

The laden wagons of all sorts creaking up on one side of the narrow road, the empty vehicles speeding down on the other, drawn oftentimes by maddened horses as shells crash around, add a new and threatening danger. The driver goes as far as he can—in between. He gives a whistle in his mouth. It has a sharp shrill that even penetrates the din and it helps somewhat. The French drivers understand and respect the ambulance.

HERE IS ONE WHO DID COME BACK

USUALLY there isn't a great deal to get excited about in the innumerable persons who appear each day in newspaper offices looking for advice, sympathy or aid. Editors get blame and hard-hearted about them, for they are mostly of the same sort.

"Starving to death, haven't eaten since yesterday." "Just the price of a one way ticket to Bridgeport. Got a job there sure." My husband has deserted me and I want you to find him. I want you to find a dozen jobs in three weeks and each time it has been "move on."

"Men are scarce these days and it's a cinch to get work. I learned the textile trade in prison and textile workers are scarce every day because so many are in the munition factories."

"But to get back to it, what am I going to do? I was pinched in Newark only yesterday and driven out when they let me go this morning. I haven't had anything to eat and I haven't got a nickel. I tell you I'm getting pretty desperate. Everywhere I go it's 'tap on the shoulder, run in jail and out of town on the run in the morning.'"

down to see Dr. Katherine R. Davis, Commissioner of Correction. Miss Davis was out West on the women's train electrifying for Harbes. Then he determined to go to a newspaper office and see if he could get some information as to whom to appeal to next.

There aren't many places where ex-convicts get much sympathy, but the advice given this one was to try a man downtown who has done something in the way of such work. The editor took the car fare offered him (this unusual, it should be noted, that is, the offering, not the taking) and departed, while the one with whom he had been talking went back to work to be laughed at by flint-hearted editors.

Three or four hours later, when the incident had been almost forgotten, there appeared again the name "John R." on a slip, this time, however, no mention being made of prison affiliations. Instead there was written, "To report an interesting story of success."

Out in the hall was the same ex-convict and yet not the same. He wore the same clothes but the look was different. Throwing open his coat without a word, he showed a warm gray sweater. Then out of his pocket he took a letter and two tickets, one on the subway and the other a one way ticket to Glens Falls, then:

Thrown a score of miles the shells carry over half a ton of high explosives. They make no sound as they come over and their pieces carry a mile.

Other American sections of the ambulance are scattered over the front not far off. The men meet each other occasionally at posts. They are doing the same work. In a short while they are carrying back all the wounded in the fighting for miles on either side. French and English sections carry away the wounded the Americans bring down to them. About a hundred Americans from the ambulance are here, and again as many from other American sections.

Overhead there are the daily conflicts high in the clouds. Many of the graceful bird things that dart here and there among the puffs of straggled or oft-times are fighting single handed two or three planes from the German side, until it seems there is no hope, are piloted by Americans.

The ambulances do much good work, the French say. As they go along the road soldiers cheer them. So each day, almost, the drivers receive some special token of commendation. In view of assembled troops some of the drivers are lined up to be thanked in the name of France—by the "médical chef" of the division, the general of the division or the general of the army. Sections and men are decorated. They have had many escapes for a second or a third or so. So far the wounds have not been many, for thus far luck has been with them.

It is the occasion of a big review of troops in Paris. In honor of the event permissions from the front have been multiplied. All the day before soldiers, many of them, are in the various towns. All the town is decorated for the gala event.

With the soldiers come many of the Americans, distinctive in uniform, happy in expression, stammering along in the tongue of the country; some hard to recognize for tan, dusty and harshly carrying bits of souvenirs from the trenches.

With almost a single accord they make for their rooms, places where they can bathe; then to dig up linen, clean shirts, white collars, for the great majority of a few glorious hours "revivals."

They flock down town, see friends and enjoy life generally. In the evening, there is a big crowd at "Hennry's." They sit around laughing and joking and exchanging experiences. Civilization is a novelty. Present are magazine and newspaper writers who hang about on most of what they say.

All of them can tell thrilling stories. In the group are several who have been wounded. One, with a boyish face, has his arm in a sling. Two shell splinters passed through it at the front.

"Great stuff being wounded," he says. "Look! See this!" and points to ragged holes in his sleeve where the pieces entered. "See this? Wounds! And see this? That's gone—real gone. Bless!"

"Should see Barber's car," some are also saying. "All shot to pieces. They can't even move in. It'd be there for good. Somebody crawled inside since. He was wounded. I guess for his head and he's still in there. You should see the all quarters. All shot up and now we're over at F—." They shell the road all the time now. They started to raise Cain after you left, F—."