

# THE CRISIS

February, 1919

## THE COLORED AMERICANS IN FRANCE

*This article appeared in a newspaper in a town in France where the 92nd Division was temporarily quartered. The author was a French woman. The translation is by Lt. Charles A. Shaw.*

**A** PEACEFUL town, far from the front. A beautiful June day, full of the perfume of roses. Resplendent summer freely bursting into bloom, indifferent to human complaints, frets and agitations.

Scene in the town: a boy of ten years, head like an urchin of the year one, runs through the streets crying, "The Americans are coming to B—; the inhabitants are invited to greet them."

"The Americans!" For months they had been discussed, they had been expected and there was great curiosity; groups of people go down to the public square of the town where they see upon the white street the first ranks of the Allied soldiers.

But, what a surprise—they are *black* soldiers! Black soldiers? Great astonishment, a little fear. The rural population, not well-informed, knows well the Negro of Africa, but that from America—the country of the classical type, characterized by the cold, smooth white face—that from America could come this dark group, none could believe his own eyes.



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386th Infantry



**CAPTAIN WILLIAM H. THOMPSON,  
317th Engineers**

They dispute among themselves, they are a little irritated; some of the women become afraid. One of them confides to me that she feels the first symptoms of an attack of indigestion. Smiling, I reassure the lady with the all too emotional stomach:

"Quiet yourself. They do not eat human flesh. Two or three days from now you will be perfectly used to them."

I said two or three days, but from that very evening the ice is broken. Native and foreigner smile at each other, and try to understand each other. The next day we see the little children in the arms of the huge Negroes, confidently pressing their rosy cheeks to the cheeks of ebony, with their mothers looking on in approbation.

A deep sympathy is created for these men, which yesterday was not even surmised. Very quickly it is seen that they have nothing of the savage in them, but that, on the other hand, one could not find a soldier more faultless in his bearing, and in his manners more affable or more delicate than these Children of the Sun, whose ancestors dreamed under the wonderful nights, along the murmuring streams.

We admire their forms, handsome, vigorous and athletic; their intelligent and loyal faces, with their large, gleaming eyes, at times dreamy and with a bit of sadness in them.

Far removed is the time when their inauspicious influence was felt upon the digestive organs of the lady. Now one is hon-

ored to have them at his table. He spends hours in long talks with them, with a great supply of dictionaries and manuals of conversation. The white mothers weep to see the photographs of the black mothers and display the portraits of their soldier sons. The fiancées of our *poilus* become interested in the fiancées across the sea—in their dress, in their head-dress, and in everything which makes woman resemble woman, in every clime.



CAPTAIN JOSEPH LOWE,  
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Late at night the workers of the fields forget their fatigue as they hear arise through the peaceful night the melancholy voices which call up to the memory of the exile his distant country.

In the lanes along the flowery hedges more than one blond head is seen moving thoughtfully beside a curly head, while the setting sun makes blue the neighboring hills, and gently the song of night is awakened.

And then, these soldiers, who had become friends, depart. One evening sad *adieux* are exchanged. *Adieux?* How we wish they may be only "*au revoirs*" (until we meet again)! Promises to correspond, to return when furloughs are granted. Here and there tears fall, and when the next day the heavy trucks roll off in the chilly morning, carrying away to the front our exotic guests, a veritable sadness seizes us!

Soldier Friends, our hearts, our wishes go with you. May the bullets of the enemy spare you. May destiny be merciful to you. And if any of you should never see

your native home again, may the soil of France give you sweet repose.

Soldiers, who arrived among us one clear June day, redolent with the scent of roses, you will always live in our hearts!



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