

# America's Holy Ground

The Thoughts of the Nation Will Turn This Memorial Day to the Resting Places of Our Hero Dead Beyond the Seas

By J. W. Rixey Smith

*The soldier dead of '61-'65 always have slept within reach of the brotherly hands that have tended their graves with special ceremonies on every Memorial Day since the close of the Civil War. The soldier dead of 1917-1918 sleep far away—too far for all save a few of us to visit their resting places on this first Memorial Day that sees the living veterans gathered in the homeland—but we may be sure that they will not be neglected. Here at home there are the graves of those of our dead who gave their lives for America as unmistakably as if they had fallen in the fastnesses of the Argonne. These we can visit. Across them we can fire the last salute, knowing that its echo will reverberate beyond the seas and down the white-crossed lanes of Suresnes, Belleau and Romagne. The part which the Legion will play in this observance has been left to the posts by National Headquarters, with full assurance that the day will be in safe keeping*

**I**N those far fields of endeavor which only lately were the battlefields of the A. E. F., the red poppies blow against the white crosses under the blue skies. In the streets of nearby villages faithful old Bijou still is hauling away the shattered stones of shattered homes. Little clumps of hamlet folk stand on this corner and that prattling away about the rising prices and the fallen franc. Suddenly there shoots by a well-remembered O. D. camion.

"Les Americains," says one.

"Quoi donc!" grunts another as he shakes his fist at the disappearing cloud of dust.

"Faites pas ca," admonishes a third. "It is the day for the dead in America and they come to put flags and flowers on the graves of the brave boys who fought for France and who sleep *la bas*."

"Well said," agree they all, and cross themselves piously in remembrance of American dead. And during the next few hours Madame, who sells the queer little wreaths of beaded flowers, is busy serving those who come to empty their scant pocketbooks.

It is the first Memorial Day in the blood-ground of the old A. E. F. without the A. E. F. By the thirtieth of last May thousands of Yanks had rolled their packs and hurried up the gang-plank for home. Before the thousands of others set sail for the American mainland they turned lovingly and proudly to those white-crossed American acres in a strange land where seventy-five thousand comrades slept.

It is toward those same American acres that American hearts everywhere will turn on the swift feet of grateful memory this Memorial Day. Throughout this broad land, wherever there is a flower laid, a flag set, a song sung or a prayer uttered, there will be magic power to waft the heart of America across the seas. Certainly no man who was ever in the A. E. F. will let the sun go down this new Memorial Day without saluting the comrades he left upon those other shores.

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But as the Frenchman always said of *l'Amerique*, and as we may now say of *la France*, "*C'est loin, c'est loin.*" The actual tribute of presence and ceremony to American dead abroad must be left to American agencies in Europe, to the Allied governments and to the folk among whom they are buried.

That this sacred trust will be met in the finest spirit is assured by reports of plans for Memorial Day overseas. No American field of honor on the other side will be without its Memorial Day ceremony, no American grave without its flag and its flowers. On that score those in this country who wear the gold-starred badge of pride need have no fear. Their wishes will be followed faithfully by those who will do honor to the dead abroad.

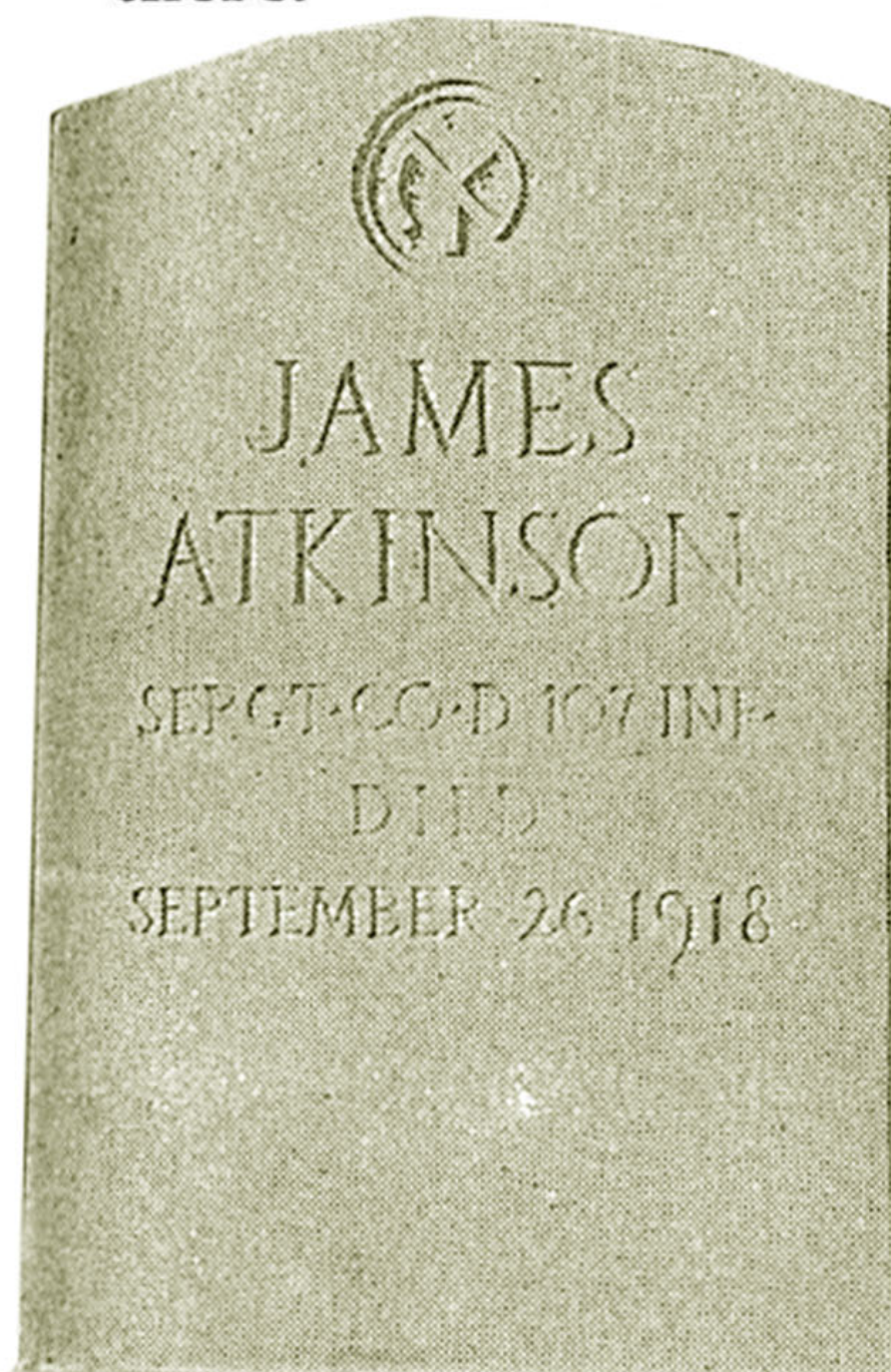
IN France particularly the details of the Memorial Day observance have been arranged carefully by a commission headed by the American ambassador, Hugh C. Wallace, and including Colonel Bentley Mott, military attache of the American Embassy in Paris, and Colonel Francis Drake as a representative of The American Legion.

The French government, acting entirely on its own initiative, will help the American commission, and prominent French government and military officials will be present at each American cemetery. The unusual interest displayed by hundreds of voluntary French societies and proffers of aid from them indicate that the French civilian population will attend the ceremonies in large numbers.

Features of the day will be proclamations by President Deschanel, Marshal Foch and Georges Clemenceau acclaiming the American dead. The three outstanding ceremonies of the day will be held in the three American cemeteries which, it is understood on the best of authority, are to be the permanent American Fields of Honor in France—Suresnes, near Paris; Belleau Wood, in the Chateau Thierry salient, and Romagne in the Argonne.

Perhaps the highest keynote of the day either abroad or in our own land will be struck at Suresnes, that high hill under the guns of Mt. Valerien, overlooking the city of Paris, to which

President Wilson, during the Peace Conference, went last Memorial Day to pay his homage to the several thousand American dead then buried there.



*The uniform headstone to be erected over the grave of every American soldier whose body remains in France. It will bear the divisional insignia*

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The first American monuments abroad authorized by the War Department is to be set up there and unveiled as a part of the Memorial Day observance. Most fitly this first authoritative monument is to be not of some great leader or general, not to commemorate some one division or some one exploit, but of that paramount figure who carved the road to victory, the American Doughboy. The statue at present in plaster cast of heroic size, is the copy and conception of the typical American infantryman by the American sculptor, Jo Davidson. As finally done in granite, it will be given by Mrs. Willard D. Straight "for sentinel duty at Suresnes."

Soon after the Armistice Mr. Davidson conceived the idea of moulding into granite or bronze, for the eyes of all time, the typical American fighting man of the great war. After a keen search through the A. E. F., he found his man and set to work. The dominant features of this soldier model were made into a miniature statue. Other models were used to complete the work.

**WHEREEVER** Memorial Day exercises are held for A. E. F. dead there will be sounded that note which is to be heard at Suresnes--of watchfulness against forgetting, of watchfulness against betraying, of watchfulness as keen and unremitting as that of any American Doughboy on sentinel duty.

In the Army of Occupation, where General Allen's forces still keep the watch on the Rhine, elaborate preparations have been made for the day's observance. In England much the same plan has been followed as in France, and the American ambassador, John W. Davis, is handling the arrangements with the help of the British government. The little, seemingly isolated, plots in Ireland and Scotland will not be forgotten. The citizens of Genoa will shower the graves of American dead in Italy with flowers, while the American embassy and the Italian government have prepared a beautiful service worthy of the friendship of the two nations.

This Memorial Day is in all probability the last to be observed so generally in foreign lands. By the time this day of flags and flowers and remembrance comes again, the majority of our dead abroad will have been reburied in native soil, and the whole task should be completed in two years. The latest estimate from those who know the wishes of the next of kin is that

of the dead will be returned to this country.

This Memorial Day finds only 458 bodies brought back from the A. E. F., - all except 150 of these having been brought from England. The 150 were the first returned from France, having been put on board the transport *Mercury* at Brest on April 6--the third anniversary of America's entrance into the war. Congressional appropriations for the fiscal year carry \$21,549,000 to bring home the dead. It is estimated that the total cost involved in the return of each body is \$500.

For a long time there had been a restriction against the removal of the

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dead of any nation from the French Zone of the Armies, but on April 19 the War Department announced that on and after September 15, next, France will waive this restriction on the 53,046 American battlefield dead.

In the meantime the American Government, The American Legion, the American Field of Honor Association and other organizations are endeavoring to see that the twenty-five thousand bodies to be left on the other side have permanent resting places worthy of their sacrifice and of the great nation and cause they served.

An interested party whose judgment can be relied upon, and who has just made a tour of American cemeteries abroad, says that "amazing progress" has been made in beautifying them, even the most temporary plots. He calls Romagne a miracle, and declares that having seen it a year ago, he could hardly believe that time and care could so soften and shade to noble beauty its then harsh lines.

A design approved by the National Fine Arts Commission has been tentatively agreed upon for a uniform headstone to replace the wooden crosses over A. E. F. dead. The Fine Arts Commission is now working for permanent design and beautification of the three permanent cemeteries.

**A DISTINGUISHED** woman, a mother whose son lies buried in France, in writing to the War Department recently said:

"Above everything else, the reason I do not wish his body brought back is that I like to fancy that he is just still in the service over there."

Still in the service. Though their bodies are turning rapidly to that dust which is forever the soil of America, no matter how far away from the marked shore lines where America is supposed to end, I do not know how anyone can think of America's overseas dead except as this mother thinks of her son—still in the service.

They are still shoulder to shoulder in their khaki lines, trudging the Ar-



*"The American Doughboy," by Jo Davidson, to be unveiled at Suresnes cemetery, near Paris, on Memorial Day*

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gonne roads, facing whatsoever fool is set against them and espousing their ideals of freedom, liberty and justice. A phantom army, yes, but just such a phantom army as saved Israel of old, and such a one as will bring the American flag spiritual reinforcements on every battlefield of peace and war.