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American Volunteer Ambulance Corps

“FOR more than twenty months it has given continual proof of the most complete spirit of self-sacrifice. It has rendered the greatest service to the division to which it has been attached, by assuring the removal of wounded men under the best conditions. There is not one of its members who is not a model of sangfroid and devotion. Several of them have been wounded.” These words of a French army order, referring to the American Volunteer Ambulance Corps, under Mr. Richard Norton, illumine one of the features of the great European struggle on which the humane and the sensitive can dwell with least repugnance. If there is ever any natural grudge on the part of the war-worn belligerent against the happy immunity of the neutral, nothing tends more quickly to assuage it than the contemplation of such marvellous examples of human kindness as the Americans have shown in feeding the hungry and succoring the sick and wounded victims of the great war. Even those of us whose admiration of American ideals may have misled them into an unreasonable expectation of America's rôle in this crisis of humanity, cannot but be deeply touched and cordially grateful for such manifestations of America's big-hearted sympathy for the suffering, and her lavish generosity in pouring in material alleviations of every kind. Next to having Americans fighting with us shoulder to shoulder for human freedom and for civilization as we and they understand it, we appreciate their comradeship in minimizing so far as possible the evils inseparable from our gigantic task.

The words at the head of this letter were used when the American Corps was selected as one of the very few to receive the honor of being “cité” in French army orders. This citation is equivalent to the grant of the Croix de Guerre to an individual, and gives Mr. Norton's convoy the right to paint that much-coveted emblem on its cars. Fortune, however, affords opportunity for gradation of honor even where all are worthy; and the Croix de Guerre has also been awarded specially to several members of the convoy. Mr. Norton himself has worn the distinction for many months. More recently the cross has been awarded to Mr. Jack Wendell and Mr. H. H. Hollinshed, who were both wounded in their courageous response to a mistaken order that summoned them and their car into a position of needless exposure. The cross was also awarded to Mr. Lawrence McCreery and the chauffeur, Harden, who volunteered with great gallantry to look for and bring in Hollinshed and Wendell—a task which they successfully accomplished. The same mistaken order also resulted in the death of one *brancardier* and the wounding of four others. Still more recently the cross has been won by Mr. William P. Clyde, of New York, and Mr. Caleb James Coatsworth,

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of Buffalo, for their exceptional services. Mr. Clyde is a Yale man who has been in continuous service with the corps for a year and a half. His "citation" intimates that he, as a "voluntaire pour une mission périlleuse s'en est acquitté avec un sang-froid remarquable, sous un feu intense et continu. Il a donné, au cours de la campagne, de nombreuses preuves de son mépris du danger et de son esprit de sacrifice." Other members of the convoy who have been similarly decorated are Mr. Spencer Hurst, who has been at work for about a year, and Leon Rapoport, a French chauffeur.

It is not surprising to learn that the headquarters of the convoy have latterly been in the neighborhood of Verdun, and that it has been ministering to the *poilus* engaged in the heroic and long-drawn-out struggle in defence of that position. It reached what might be called its first Verdun camp on June 8, and thereafter had some weeks of extraordinary activity. During this period the men were at work night and day, having to do without sleep except at rare intervals and snatching their food how and when they could. Though many of the cars were hit, no serious casualties were suffered other than those already mentioned. A shell on one occasion burst within twenty feet of Mr. Norton, wrecking his car and slightly wounding his companion, Mr. L. H. Northrop.

Later the convoy was supposed to be "en repos" at a small town a little behind Verdun. This "repose," however, was by no means stagnation, as the cars still coöperated with the French ambulances by receiving cases brought to posts in the rear of the line and removing them to hospitals still farther back. At each of such posts, two cars and four men are on duty for twenty-four hours every two days. Their rest simply means that their work is not absolutely continuous. The score or so of tents forming the camp of the corps are pitched in a beautiful meadow on the banks of the Meuse; and in the centre is the large wagon-tent of Mr. Norton, where he is kept busy dealing with reports, complaints, instructions, and a constant stream of visitors.

Mr. Harjes, head of the American Red Cross in France, is now associated with Mr. Norton in the general management of the American Volunteer Ambulance service in the French army. Their great object is to increase the number of convoys now at work, for the demand is ever on the increase. A convoy consists, as a unit, of twenty ambulance cars, a lorry, a workshop-car, and a kitchen-car. Only cars of large and powerful make are adequate for the work. Cars, men, and money are all wanted. According to a military ruling of the French Government, all members who join have to sign on for six months. The average cost of a car, with all its appurtenances, is from \$2,500 to \$8,000. The American representatives of the corps are Mr. Eliot Norton (2 Rector Street, New York) and Mr. F. C. Havemeyer (129 Front Street, New York).

JAMES F. MUIRHEAD

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