

# A Doughboy Returns to France

By CORLISS HOOVEN GRIFFIS.

**A**FTER three months in France, Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg, following the devious tracks of the American soldier of four years ago, the question inevitably arises as to what part of the trip made the greatest impression upon us and what we found of most conspicuous interest to a former doughboy. The answer is: The silent rear guard of the American Expeditionary Force.

There is close to an even war strength division of them now—30,000; those who are still on duty here to see that the work that we started will be finished. They have not been discharged from their task, for they are still in uniform, they have their orderly formation and the flag flies over them. There is the post of honor.

It is difficult for me to describe the American cemeteries we have seen. We have visited them all. So profound is their appeal that the subject cannot be adequately treated in words. They are altogether wonderful, always inspiring.

Of all our experiences in France this summer we saw nothing which came closer to making us forget our own individuality than our first glimpse of the Meuse-Argonne Cemetery at Romagne-Montfaucon. Coming over the hill at Cunel suddenly ahead of you appears a tall, white pole in the distance, from which floats out a bit of bright colored bunting. Around the base of this pole you see a veritable film of white—a hazy, ethereal species of cloud which hovers on the ground. If you did not know what to expect it truly would baffle you.

It has been a solemn pilgrimage for us to visit every one of the six American cemeteries in France and the one in Belgium. But to get one glimpse of the Meuse-Argonne Cemetery is in itself worth a trip to Europe; there is nothing quite like it, we are told, in the whole world. No matter where you have been or where you will go, nothing in existence, so it is said, can compare to it. It is beautiful from any angle or at any time, and beautiful in a remarkable degree.

There are no two of the American cemeteries exactly alike, for each is laid out in a different manner, in conformity with the surroundings. At the present time they are not all in finished shape, because the work on the permanent beautification is still in progress, but their final appearance could readily be conceived.

The first that we saw was the St. Mihiel Cemetery at Thiaucourt. It rests on the summit of a lofty ridge, from which the larger portion of the St. Mihiel salient can be surveyed. Across the valley in the distance looms Mont Sec, from which German guns for so many months harassed the American troops. The flagpole in the cemetery was originally a German wireless aerial, which was captured during the offensive and is so high that it is visible for miles in all directions. The cemetery is most appropriately located in the very center of the battlefield, on ground that was won after terrific fighting.

We next saw the Meuse-Argonne Cemetery at Romagne, the largest cemetery in all France, containing about 14,000 graves. It is not possible to compare this cemetery with any other, as the difference in size makes it overpoweringly wonderful. It also is situated in about the center of the battlefield, half way between the Meuse River and the Argonne Forest. It is on the side of a gentle slope which rises from the road, and the flagpole is on the highest part of the crest at the back of the cemetery, completing the picture—as beautiful a picture, indeed, as can be beheld anywhere.

There are two cemeteries in the Chateau Thierry sector, one at Belleau Wood and one at Fere-en-Tardenois. At Belleau

Wood the situation is ideal. When completed it will provide a view to remember. The graves are grouped around the base of the wooded hill which rises as a background. The cemetery will be semi-circular in shape, following the contour of the elevation, and it is placed on the exact spot of the notable victory of June, 1918.

At Fere-en-Tardenois is the American cemetery second in size, with over 6,000 graves in this plot. It is now in process of

crosses. Sometimes in catching the hues of the sky they would all be pink, sometimes a golden yellow, always a suggestion of a shifting field of pale color. Under the white moonlight they were perhaps most beautiful of all. Then the crosses became a mist which seemed to billow over the hill. It might almost be imagined that this mist represented the spirits of the brave boys who were hovering there, around the towering flag pole.



The American Cemetery at Romagne, France.

reconstruction and consequently does not give the best impression of how the completed tract will look. However, the location is perfect, and the plans point to the fact that it will be as beautiful as all the rest.

The Somme Cemetery at Bony was originally laid out by the men of the Twenty-seventh Division of New York. It is essentially a battlefield cemetery. In the center of a scarred and desolate country, it lies within a stone's throw of the point where the Americans broke the Hindenburg line. The whole atmosphere of the spot differs from that of any other, and it is so thoroughly a part of the battlefield that it almost seems like desecration to want to have it beautified. Here the bodies have not been moved since they were buried just after being killed, and they will rest here, forever, undisturbed.

At Waerghem, in Belgium, is the American cemetery, officially known as "Flander's Field." It is the smallest of them all, but possesses a charm above the rest. The crosses are arranged in the shape of a quadrangle, with an open field in the center. Every cross faces this enclosure, where stands the flag pole. The situation is so unaffected and simple that one cannot but partake of the rest and quiet of the place. It is in a correspondingly simple part of the country, with the friendly farmhouses all about and the boys lying not far from the places where they fell.

The last of the cemeteries we visited was at Suresnes, on the outskirts of Paris. This was originally built during the war and was filled with the graves of the boys who died in the hospitals. It has had great care and is in finished shape now.

After several days in going over the terrain around Verdun we had started for Romagne and the cemetery there, thinking to spend an hour or so at the spot as some slight tribute to our dead buddies. The result of that visit was that we sent for our luggage from Verdun and our visit of an hour lengthened into a stay of a week. It was impossible for us to leave—the spell was too great.

This sojourn at Romagne was our great experience in France. All other sights and sensations have taken second place. Morning, afternoon and evening, in the sunlight and in the rain, at sunset and under the rays of the moon—each time the crosses looked different, each time more beautiful.

We could never tire of standing in front of the cemetery at evening, just as the sun was sinking, and watching the reflection of the varying shades of light on the

French and British cemeteries. The American number is only 1,874, a relatively small percentage of the whole, while two-thirds of the French graves from the Verdun battle are classed as unknown. This is a tribute to our careful system of identification tags, teeth charts and burials. Too much credit for this cannot be given to the Graves Registration Service, who are still making positive identifications among our unknown dead. Their work has been going on quietly for four years, and the wonderful results merit the highest praise.

After seeing the work from all sides and knowing the care and attention that is given to each burial, I would say positively that the Graves Registration Service is as free from making mistakes as any human agency can be. There are absolutely no grounds for thinking that any body that has been returned to the United States for final burial is not the right one, nor that there has been any possibility of mistake. The thoroughness of the service is marvelous to see and comforting in the extreme.

Having seen both France and Germany, and the French and the Germans this time, four years after the fighting ceased, we have been able to arrive at a much clearer idea of the two peoples than we could gather during the war. Then it was impossible to arrive at the truth, but now I believe that we have discerned the real feeling in those countries—toward each other and toward ourselves.

One thing remains certain. France, our sincere friend and ally, is still as close to us as she was the day we declared war on Germany. She believes that she understands us, and I am quite sure that she respects us as she does no other nation or people.

So far as we are concerned, we have seen France struggling heroically under tremendous difficulties and making the most of them. She is playing her part splendidly and has won our personal admiration for all time to come. To be sure she has faults, as we and the best of our friends have faults, but her virtues enormously outweigh them.

The really important thing about the whole trip is that we can return to the United States with our heads up and shoulders squared back, proud to be able to call ourselves Americans. Everywhere we have found traces of the A. E. F.—traces to make us not only forever proud but which will give us an earnest enthusiasm to carry on the same kind of work in the future.

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stand; those who have not can hope some day to be able also to make the trip to France.

It would not be enough to tell only of the American cemeteries in France, as those of our allies are almost as important to us and merit the same respect, even if we cannot give them the same love. They are to be found in much larger numbers, naturally, since both British and French casualties were ten or twelve times as much as American. However, neither French nor British have been able to give as much care to their graves as has the U. S. Graves Registration Service. There are many reasons, the most obvious being that it is so prodigious a task, and they have not the money.

Everywhere along the front little cemeteries are found scattered over the battlefields. Sometimes there will be several thousand graves, and often only a few dozen. It is not unusual, as we have before observed, to find French and German graves in the same spot, with white crosses for the Allies and black crosses for the Germans. Another very noticeable thing is the vast number of unknown dead in the

French and British cemeteries. The American number is only 1,874, a relatively small percentage of the whole, while two-thirds of the French graves from the Verdun battle are classed as unknown. This is a tribute to our careful system of identification tags, teeth charts and burials. Too much credit for this cannot be given to the Graves Registration Service, who are still making positive identifications among our unknown dead. Their work has been going on quietly for four years, and the wonderful results merit the highest praise.

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