

Frank Hurst on The Western Front

Marie Morgan

When the United States entered the war in April 1917, Frank Hurst was a senior at Dartmouth. He enlisted when the first draft was issued. When he said goodbye at the station where the troops were to leave for New York, his mother and Helen Smith were in tears. He leaned far out the train window to see them for what might be the last time.

At New York he boarded a small steamer along with two or three hundred other men. The voyage was no fun, the quarters were crowded, he was seasick, and everyone was afraid of German submarines and torpedoes.

After what seemed an interminable period of time the ship docked at Liverpool. They were welcomed enthusiastically and carried by train to London, where they embarked for Le Havre. The trip across the English channel was hazardous, but it took only two hours.

From Havre his company marched to Belleau Woods where he fought in a terrible battle. The men were fighting hard but they were tired. Frank saw a German machine gunner and fired. Just as he fired he felt a stinging sensation in his right arm. He looked down and it was bleeding. He fought on and on; all that night the battle lasted. He kept on, though he could hardly move one foot ahead of the other, until he finally fell from sheer exhaustion and loss of blood.

When he regained consciousness, he was lying in a bed. Other men were lying in beds in long rows on each side of the building. Women in white were moving here and there among the beds. He finally concluded that he was in a hospital. When a nurse came by, he asked where he was and was informed that he was in a Red Cross Hospital in Paris.

He lay there wondering what happened to the rest of his troop,

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since no one could give him any information about them. He was in the hospital until March 1918.

When he left, he was ordered to Verdun. A drive was begun on Agrinne Forest in hope of cutting off the retreat from France. The troops fought hard but it was a region of deep forests, high hills, and marshy valleys, and progress was slow. The first attack was not successful. On September 25 the men were excited, for news that another concentrated drive was to be started had spread along the lines. Many said it would be the deciding battle of the war. On the morning of September 26 the word was given to push forward. For over a month they pushed slowly, but steadily forward, fighting in mud and rain. It was beginning to get cool and Frank often longed for a warm coat. At last on November 1 the German defenses broke and the troops pushed forward. Frank was exhausted but triumphant.

News was being passed to the men that the German were conferring with the Allied leaders about peace terms. At eleven o'clock on November 11 the booming of guns along the lines ceased and instead the cheering of men was heard. Frank's first thought was about home and Helen. On November 15 his troop (not nearly as large as it was when it arrived in France) left Liverpool for New York. On his arrival they were greeted by tumultuous cheering. Helen and his mother were there to greet him.

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