

PRIVATE LARNEY'S OWN GRAPHIC ACCOUNT OF THE GERMAN DEMAND TO SURRENDER, OF WHITTLESEY'S UNDRAMATIC REFUSAL, AND OF THE LOST BATTALION'S RESCUE



General Pershing decorating members of the 77th Division, of which the Lost Battalion was a unit.

By Thomas M. Johnson

A FASCINATING new version of the supreme test of fortitude that the Lost Battalion withstood triumphantly at the most agonizing moment of its ordeal in the Argonne Forest has come to life. It illuminates the greatest epic of bravery in the American part in the World War.

New lines of that epic are written in the diary, just revealed, which Jim Larney, of Watertown, N. Y., kept all through the siege. Dawn of that siege's fifth morning showed pitilessly the desperate plight of the survivors. Ragged, filthy, they crouched in holes dug in the slope of Charlevaux Valley, gripping their rifles, glaring with haggard eyes toward the besieging Germans.

Chill night had added torture for near 200 of the wounded, many of whose bandages came from the hundred and more dead. The wounded cried out piteously to their comrades: "For God's sake, water!" Or "Come and turn me over, won't you?" Or, "Boys, I'm going! Write my mother—please—please!"

The effect of hunger on tortured human endurance caused the German demand that the Lost Battalion surrender, all of which Jim Larney saw. Despite his stiffened arm, wounded by "friendly" artillery, Larney scrawled in his diary:

"Germans call upon us to surrender. No attention paid to this demand which was made by letter and sent with one of our men who had been taken prisoner."

The man was Lowell W. Hollingshead of Mount Sterling, O. With nine other famished soldiers of H Co., 308th Infantry, 77th Division, he had been tantalized unbearably by food that seemed to fall from Heaven, yet, with hellish perversity, just beyond reach. In big, tempting packages it had been dropped by American aviators who hoped to aid the Lost Battalion, but who did not know where the surrounded force was.

STILL hoping to get a package, the 10 Americans went straight into the arms of the Germans. Half were killed, the rest wounded. Whereupon, Lieut. Heinrich Prinz, once of Spokane, Wash., persuaded Hollingshead again to risk death and, giving up the security of a prisoner-of-war, to take a letter to Major Whittlesey.

"The suffering of your wounded men can be heard in the German lines," it said, among other things, "and we are appealing to your human sentiments" (to surrender).

The incident has been celebrated in song, story and picture: Whittlesey, heroically erect, replying to a German standing before him, "Go to hell!"

But at that historic moment Jim Larney, crouched 10 feet from Whittlesey, saw what happened when Hollingshead, leg bandaged, carrying a light cane bearing a white tag, limped up, escorted by a non-commissioned officer. Whittlesey's reply to the Germans—there was no German present—was neither "Go to hell!" nor anything else. He put away the letter. (It now is at Williams Col-



Hurled back again, the Germans turned against the defenders their cruellest weapon—liquid fire.

lege, his alma mater near his home, Pittsfield, Mass.) And what then happened Larney thus describes in his diary:

"Whittlesey reprimanded Hollingshead for leaving us without orders and put message inside his blouse without comment as to letter. Told man who brought Hollingshead in to put H. with other wounded. Told Baldwin and I to take in our panels for fear Germans would think they were a white flag. We called to Private Irving Liner (now of the Bronx, N. Y.) to pull in the panels of white cloth which were near his funkhole and he reached out and pulled them in."

It took no "Go to hell!" message to tell the Germans that was Whittlesey's answer. The men of the Lost Battalion told them it was their answer, too—and in German. Already they had shouted across to the besiegers taunts that they were a "Wind-Bag Bunch!"—which from the reaction it provoked must have been the most scurrilous abuse known to the German army. Now the Americans added, even invented, new epithets. "No falling back!" was still their first and great commandment.

The Germans replied—with hand grenades. From the ridge above, the bombs whirled through the trees, sometimes in clusters of two or three, to explode shatteringly among the weakened men who grimly held on.

Hurled back again, the Germans turned against the defenders the cruellest weapon in the arsenal of warfare—liquid fire. To frighten, then to burn to a crisp, is the aim of the flame that spurts from a hose attached to a tank

A Newly Discovered Diary of the LOST BATTALION

and weakness, is surely best able to describe that scene. Here is what Larney wrote in his diary:

"Tues., Oct. 8. Relief complete. Went out in ambulances at 5 or 6 P. M. After 2 long auto trips was operated on at Red Cross Base Hospital. (This line was written in later.) We obtained some food and ate ravenously. Major Whittlesey has seen that food was distributed."

The diary entries of that day of days in the life of Jim Larney, and each of the 252 who came out of "the Pocket," were written sometimes in pencil, sometimes in ink, in a hospital bed, or on a hospital train. Here is an entry headed "Later":

"Capt. L. Breckenridge (Lucien S. Breckenridge of New York) saw me swinging from tree to tree as my legs were weak as I tried to get to ambulance up hill. He got behind me and took twist in my belt and said, 'Keep your legs going, Bud, and I will push you up there,' and he did. At Division Field Hospital in empty church somewhere I got soup and cigarets. Vomited the soup. Couldn't hold it."

"General Alexander's words when he go to us:

"Well, you men have sat heavy on my chest for a week. I guess we lost more men trying to get you out than you had—"

(Then the writing fades, but to this day Larney can remember the rest:

Major W. was alone, as for other officers, when message was delivered by Private Lowell Hollingshead, a released prisoner of the Germans. W. reprimanded Hollingshead for leaving us without orders and put message inside his blouse without comment as to letter. Told man who brought Hollingshead in to put H. with other wounded. Told Baldwin and I to take in our panels for fear Germans would think they were a white flag. We called to Private Irving Liner to pull in the panels of white cloth which were near his funkhole and he reached out and pulled them in.

The above portion of Larney's diary refutes the "Go to hell" version of Major Whittlesey's refusal to surrender, with the notation that the commanding officer of the Lost Battalion put the German note in his blouse "without comment."

"—in here. But never mind that! Where's Major Whittlesey?"

(Whittlesey and McMurtry later were promoted and received the Congressional Medal of Honor. And then, shortly after the war, came Whittlesey's tragic end. He leaped into the sea from a steamship, leaving one of the most glorious traditions of the World War behind him.)

Larney's next diary entry was Wednesday, Oct. 9:

"Moved by train to evacuation base hospital at Chaumont, Base 10. While we lay on stretchers on railroad platform close beside hospital, Jerry's planes raiding near town. We can hear anti-aircraft and occasional heavy crash. Wonder if we are going to get ours way back here?"

That would have been an ironical anti-climax. But no—

"Relieved to be loaded on American hospital train and leave town. Swell accommodations after Argonne mud!"

Larney felt even better when they put in his hands an English newspaper. In it he read that he and all the others of the Lost Battalion were heroes. He says:

"That was the first I knew of it!"

The End

carried on a soldier's back. But the Lost Battalion refused to be impressed. Larney wrote in his diary:

"Machine gun non-com reports to Major Whittlesey liquid fire came out of clump of bushes and he turned machine gun in there and heard no more of it. Major tells him he had done right thing and if it shows up again do the same."

Darkness was closing down that evening of Oct. 7. It foreboded another cold night for the Americans, tortured by hunger and the pain of wounds, out on that shambles of a hillside that was becoming a pitted catacomb under the pitiless stars—3000 miles from home. Home? What man of the 252 yet living of nearly 600, ever expected in that black hour that he would see home again?

Yet, but a short time afterward, with a heart full of thankfulness, Jim Larney sighed happily, relaxed on a stretcher, drew forth his faithful black-bound diary and, easing his wounded arm, wrote these words:

"307th effects liaison on right at dark, and brings up rations. What a relief! In the nick of time!"

So ended in success five days of anxious, straining effort to get through to the Lost Battalion.

THERE was no cheering or wild demonstration. The men were too weak for that—but not too weak to crawl to their helpless wounded and whisper that it was all over and soon there would be food, surgeons, ambulances. One of those gray-faced, white-lipped men, biting his lips to keep back pain