



UNTOLD TALES OF FALMOUTH

from the archives of Museums on the Green

From Heaven to Hell via Hoboken, part 3

On the 14th of June, we started on a hike to the trenches. We started on the march about seven o'clock in the evening with full equipment, up a mountain trail, on a hill which was the steepest I ever hope to see. We dodged shell holes, climbed over fallen trees, and up and down steep inclines. It was so dark that we could hardly see and had to navigate mostly by sound. We arrived at the headquarters of the La Cude sector, where we relieved the "Frogs." We were the first Americans to go in this sector. It was a sort of trial front for the green troops.

The next day I went out on a working party, that is, we went out at night. A detail from our company rebuilt, before morning, over a mile of trench system which had been torn down by enemy fire.

The second night I went out on a wire mending party. My first time "Over the Top," only there was nothing to it, but a little work, some crawling around in the mud and a few stray machine gun bullets.

Here I was put on as a company runner and had to learn the entire trench system in our sector. It was easy enough in the daytime, but at night, was pretty ticklish work for a while, when one wrong turn might take a fellow miles out of his way, and probably into the enemy lines.

On July 12 we were moved on trucks to Moyencmoutier. We hiked into the trenches, and I was sent to "La Chappelle" as runner between the 22nd company 279th regiment French and I company. One night I was given a message by Capt. Schmidt to deliver to Lt.

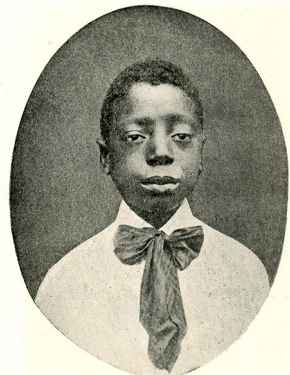
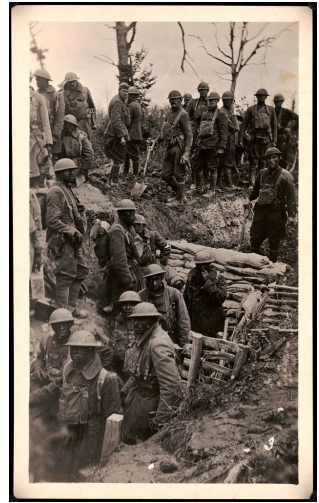


*Top: Poster in the Museums' collection.
Middle: U.S. Marines in France digging in. Photo from [Library of Congress](#).
Bottom: U.S. troops learn how to use grenade guns. Photo from [Library of Congress](#).*

Leurs at Co. I. As I approached the first outpost, I caught the dim outline in the moonlight, of a sentry, with his rifle leveled on me. I dropped to the bottom of the trench and yelled at him. He lowered his rifle and I advanced. On questioning him, I found that he had received orders from Schmidt to shoot without warning anyone who came through the trenches after nine at night. The next morning I filed a complaint against Schmidt with Leurs. Schmidt was called on the carpet, and it is safe to say that after what he heard from the Colonel, he was very careful about issuing orders.

On August 18th we hiked back to the Mare Henri Division of the Fontaine sector, where we served for five days until the 92nd, colored division came up to relieve us. During our stay in this sector, one of the fake gas alarms sounded. It happened that Shorty Mays (Shorty died from pneumonia, shortly after the Armistice) was shaving, and had hung his gas mask on a tree. When the alarm came in, Shorty shut his eyes, held his breath and started running from tree to tree, for his mask. I suppose if there had been any gas it would have seemed funny, on account of the stunts he pulled, but without gas it was a side splitter.

On August 29th we traveled by auto trucks through Epinal and Charmes, arriving at a French Army camp at Hausonville the next day. One afternoon, just after chow call had blown, I heard quite a bombardment overhead and finally located about a dozen planes having a free for all. All of a sudden one of the planes dove, with another after it. The first one came down with a series of turns, while the second plane came in a nose dive. They both disappeared over the brow of a hill and we imagined that they were both smashed into a thousand pieces. We were busy watching the other planes which were still fighting, when we heard the roar of a motor and saw a plane coming over the hill and towards the camp. As it got closer it swooped down and right



Priv. Charles E. F. DeWallis
Died of Wounds in France, August 26, 1918.
Age 19 years

Top: African-American soldiers of the 92nd Infantry Division entering a trench, ca. 1918. Photograph retrieved from the [Library of Congress](#).

Bottom: Falmouth resident Charles DeWallis was honored with the town's other war dead in a commemorative booklet now in the museums' archives. His unit is unknown, but in the racially segregated army of that time, there is a good chance that he served with the 92nd division.

over our section of the camp, and probably a hundred feet in the air. We noticed the Iron Cross on the wings, and some few of us ducked, expecting a shower of lead. I was too surprised to get my rifle and take a shot at them and just stood still, wondering what was coming next. The observer was standing in the gun pit, at his machine gun, and a fine shot he had at about four thousand men. He was on a different errand, however. He landed about a mile from the camp with engine trouble and he and the pilot were taken prisoner. We afterward learned that the Germans had disabled the French plane and that both Frenchmen were killed as they fell to the earth.

While at La Chappelle we suffered our first casualty, when Private Wanzie was killed by shrapnel during a bombardment. He was buried in a French plot on the front. We fixed the grave as well as possible and placed a small American flag over it. One of my pals, Harry Killian, was badly wounded at the time Wanzie was killed. He spent the better part of three years in hospitals as a result.

This finished the trench warfare, and on the 6th of September we left for the big event of the war, at the St. Mihiel salient.

*J. Robert Kershaw
(1894-1959)*

To be continued . . .

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Top: Western Front, 1918, from a map at the Library of Congress. For higher resolution click [here](#).

Bottom: German fighter plane, Pfalz D.XII, ca. 1918. Photo from the [Smithsonian Air and Space Museum](#).