



## UNTOLD TALES OF FALMOUTH

from the archives of Museums on the Green

### From Heaven to Hell via Hoboken, part 4

On the night of Sept. 12th we started on a hunt for action along the muddiest road I ever saw. On the last leg of the hike, we passed the French and American artillery, which were pounding on the forts around Metz, and on all the important roads and railroads. It sounded as though Hell had broken loose. There were 2500 guns of all sizes on a 20 kilometer front, and the orders were to fire at will, and those boys sure were loading fast. The bombardment lasted for three days and nights. We passed so close to the guns at times that we could feel the heat from the discharge, and the roar was enough to shatter one's nerve.

We moved up again, on the heels of the 6th and 11th Infantry, who were holding the old German lines. The other brigade went across the next morning early; we were right after them. They drove the Huns back about five kilos. The Division had several tanks which cut through the barbed wire and made a passage for the troops. We leapfrogged the 10th Brigade on the night of the 15th and took our place on the lines.

I made the rounds, finding out where the different companies were located and reporting to battalion HQ. Had to cross an open field, then through the woods, which were being continually shelled with gas, both phosgene and chlorine. My lungs got thoroughly saturated with gas, although I was not aware of it at the time. It made me feel rather dead and dopey. On the 18th, we drew our first real chow since the 10th: meat, spuds, onions, bread, and coffee. Believe me, it looked good, and I drew a kit full, and started to enjoy myself.



*Top and middle: World War I recruiting posters at the Museums.*

*Bottom: Tank advancing through trenches towards the German line at St. Mihiel, 1918. [Photo from Library of Congress.](#)*

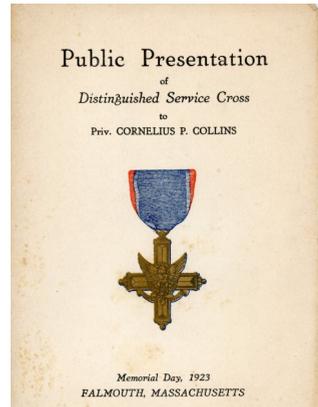
I tried first one thing and then another. They didn't taste right, and the food came up as fast as it went down. The trouble was with the gas I had inhaled. It had filled my lungs and stomach.

At three that afternoon, the order came: "Over and at Them" from Col. Wise. But then HQ had a radio to "Hold." A regular panic was the result. The runners were called for, and were rushed out with the orders to stop the companies before they had a chance to get started. If we had been late it would have been a complete sweep for the Germans and a terrible loss to our side. We had but ten minutes to make the trip, which was all of half a mile. I never made better time, over the shell torn ground and through a barrage at the edge of the woods. I reached the last company just as Lt. Brown was ordering his men to start. I had tossed away my rifle and belt at the start of the trip. This was the closest shave I ever had.

That night we were relieved by the 78th Division, green troops who promptly lost what ground we had gained. We arrived at Frencheville on the 21st. I was in bed with fever and gas poisoning for three days, and got a real rest. On the 28th we hiked to Charmes la Cote. On the 3rd of October we left there, on trucks, with Indo Chinese for drivers.

We unloaded the following afternoon just north of Verdun. We could hear the battle raging in front of us, saw troops, trucks, and ambulances rushing to the front, saw the airplanes, and the observation balloons at their work. It looked as though we were in for it. The Germans had a good line on where we were and kept things pretty warm with their barrages and long distance bombardments.

On the 8th, Phil Clinton, Dan Wesner and myself were sent to the Souilly aviation camp, for ground instructions in Signal work. But on the third day we received a hurry call to report to our companies. We caught up with them at the edge of the woods at Made-



Falmouth's Hero  
CORNELIUS P. COLLINS

*Falmouth resident Cornelius Collins was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for extraordinary heroism in action near Chateau-Thierry, France, July 29, 1918. When the advance of his platoon was held up by enemy fire from a machine gun nest, Collins with several others charged the nest but were repulsed, all but three being killed or wounded. He and two comrades immediately volunteered and made the second assault, which was successful. He was severely wounded on July 30th.*

*The program from Collins' medal presentation ceremony is currently on display in the Hallett Barn as part of our exhibit, "The Doughboys Go to War."*

lene Farms. We got into it the next morning when we went over the top, at about 5 a.m. From the 11th to the 18th, the losses in the Division were terrible. The dead were lying from one end of the front to the other. Co. I lost a large number through death and wounds. Lt. Brown and Vinson were injured. Major Rivet and Sgt. Stanton were killed by snipers. Watson, Castriagino, and McCabe were killed in one dugout, when a high explosive shell landed in the hole. I had been in the hole with them not five minutes before. I was lucky in this case, as in plenty of others when I moved just in time.

The woods were full of light artillery firing almost point blank, and machine guns every few hundred feet. The front as well as the back areas were being shelled continually. The sights that one saw every minute were terrible, and the runners saw more of the aftermath of a battle than any others. On carrying messages, we were forced to stop and help some poor devil, who had been hit, although we were under orders to stop for nothing, as the messages were supposed to be more valuable than one single wounded man. A message which was not delivered on time might mean the slaughter of a whole company. The runners wore red strips around the left arm, so that someone, on seeing a runner lying beside the road dead or wounded, would search him for messages, and if found deliver them at once.

We moved back for two days, about half a mile in rear of the lines. Our company was all shot. Out of the 150 men who had entered, only seventy two were left.

*J. Robert Kershaw  
(1894-1959)*

*To be continued . . .*

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Watch U.S. Army newsreels of the action at [St. Mihiel](#) and the [Argonne Forest](#)

Take part in an [interactive recreation of the Argonne offensive](#)



*Top: Detail from a poster in the Museums' collection.*

*Middle: French sergeant and military dog with gas masks. [Photo from the Library of Congress.](#)*

*Bottom: American Red Cross worker ministering to the wounded. Argonne Forest, October 11, 1918. [Photo from the Library of Congress.](#)*